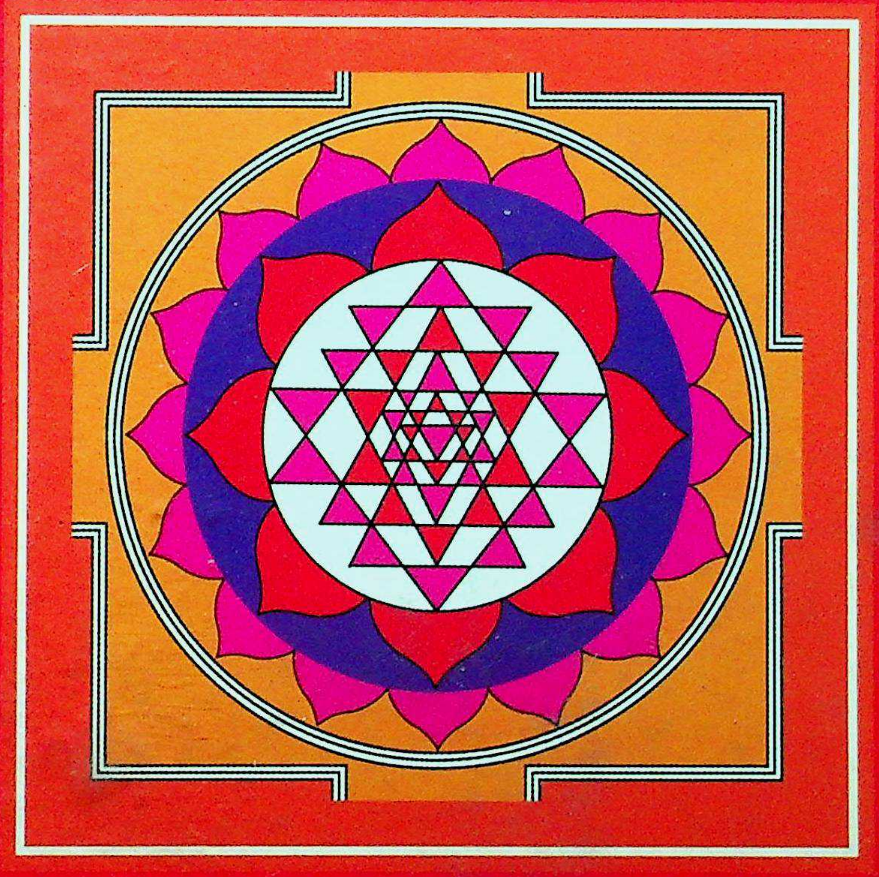
VOICE OF THE GURU

Śrī Śaṅkara Bhagavatpādācārya's

SAUNDARYALAHARĪ

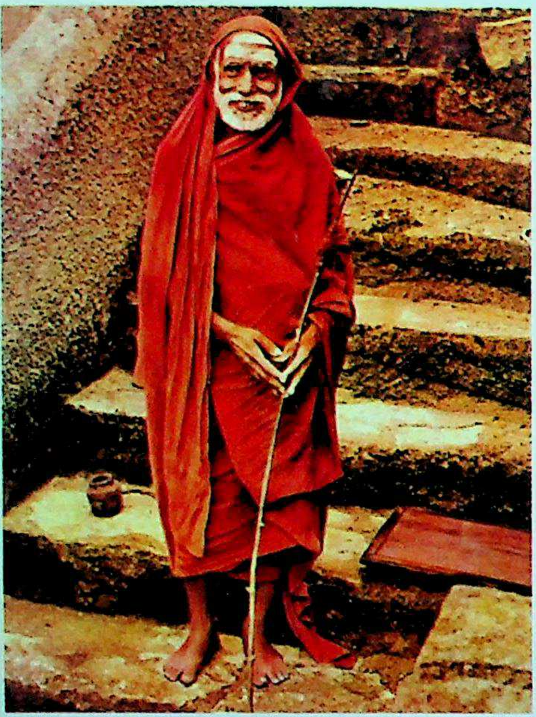
सौन्दर्यलहरी



Śrīcakra

An Exposition by
Pūjyaśrī Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī Svāmī,
68th Śaṅkarācārya of Kāñcī Kāmakoṭi Pīṭha

Bharatiya Vidya
Bhavan



Pūjyaśrī Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī Svāmī (1894-1994) must be regarded as the greatest seer of our time. This gentle saint and mystic, whose life spanned almost the whole of the 20th century, created a spiritual and moral awakening in the land and made an immense contribution to its cultural resurgence. But he stood for all human civilization and he had a message for all mankind. He richly deserved the title of "Jagadguru", as one who taught in terms of the entire universe. His devotees believe that, like Ādi Śaṅkara before him, he too was an incarnation of Śiva together with Ambā. In these decades of struggle and turmoil, of conflict and hatred, he stood out as a luminous figure upholding the values of tolerance and charity and friendship and showed himself to be godly in his overflowing grace and compassion, while yet remaining intensely human.

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।
ā no bhadrāḥ kratavo yantu viśvataḥ
Let noble thoughts come to us from every side.
— Ṛgveda, I-89-i

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

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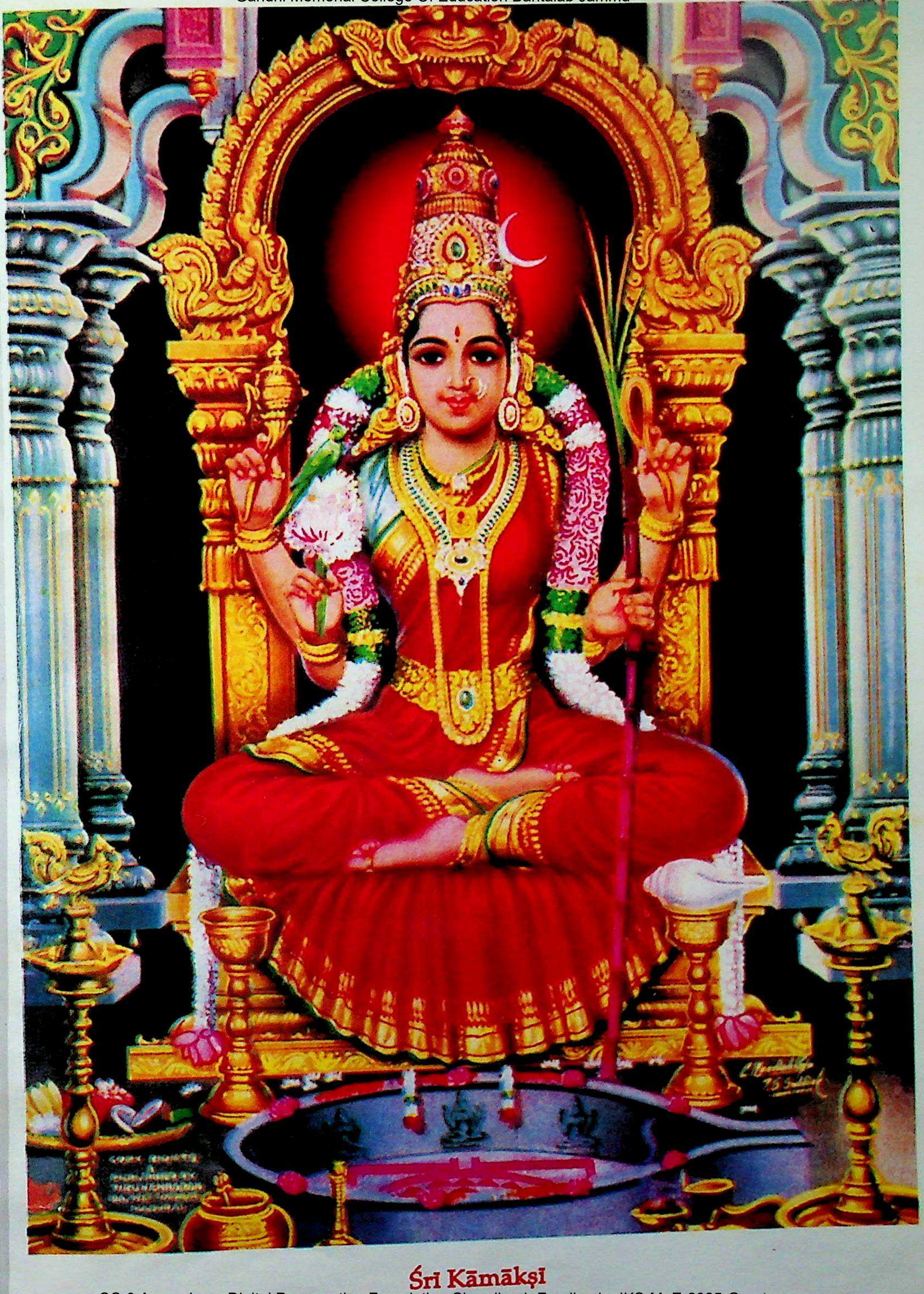

Śrī Kāmākṣī

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Śri Śaṅkara Bhagavatpādācārya's

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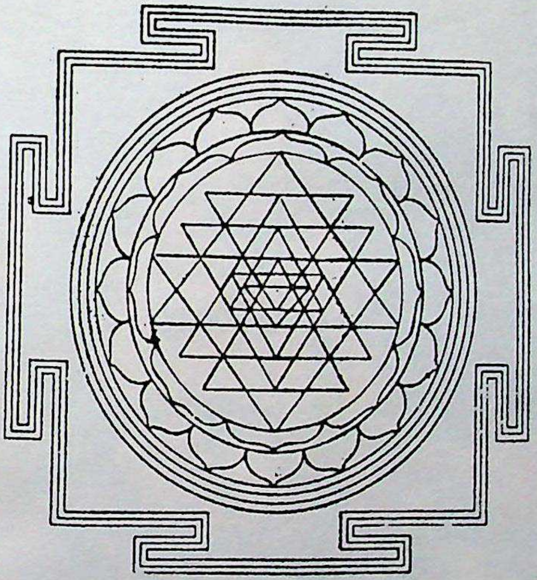

An Exposition by

Pūjyaśrī Candrasekharendra Sarasvatī Svāmī

2001

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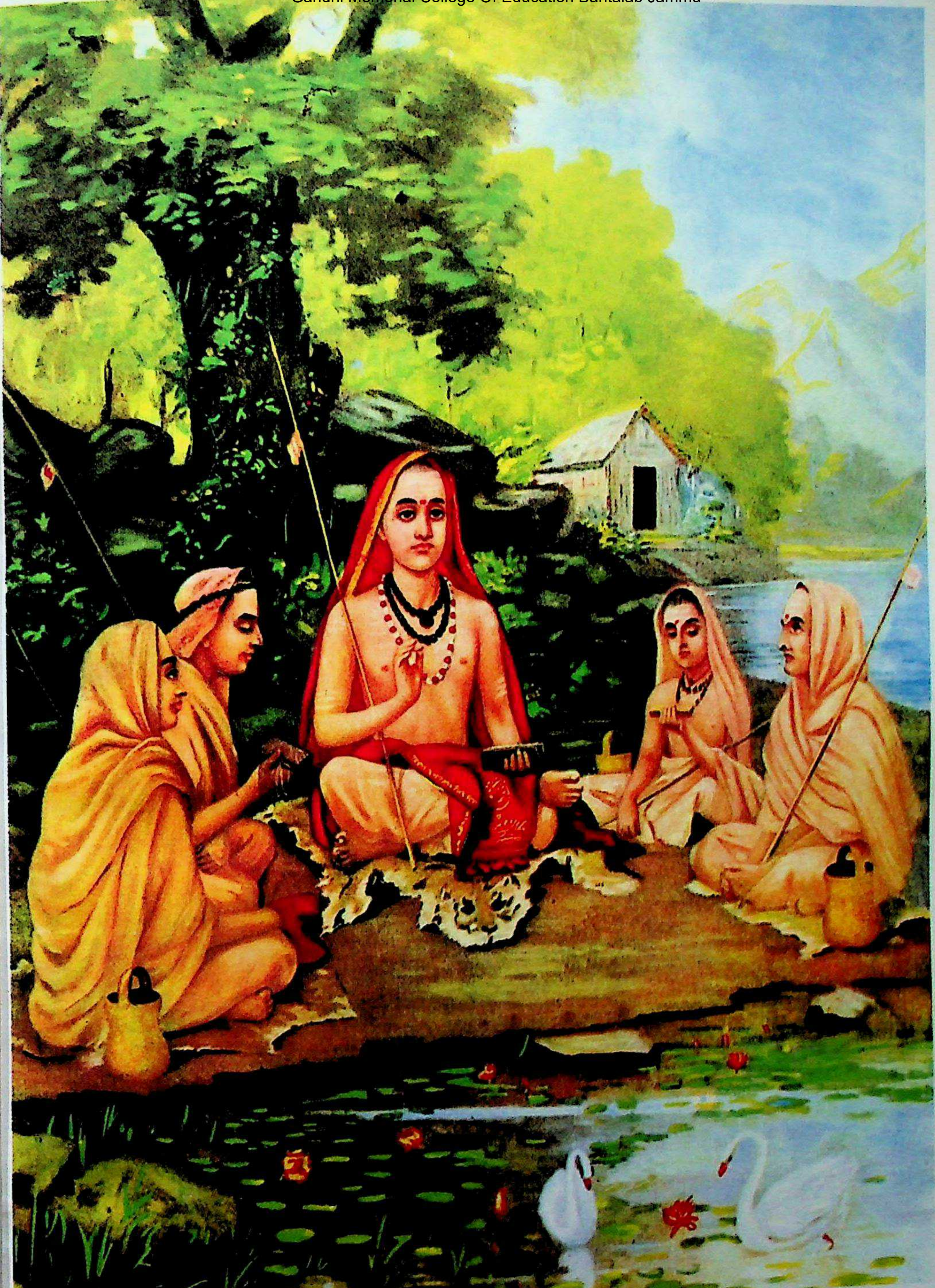
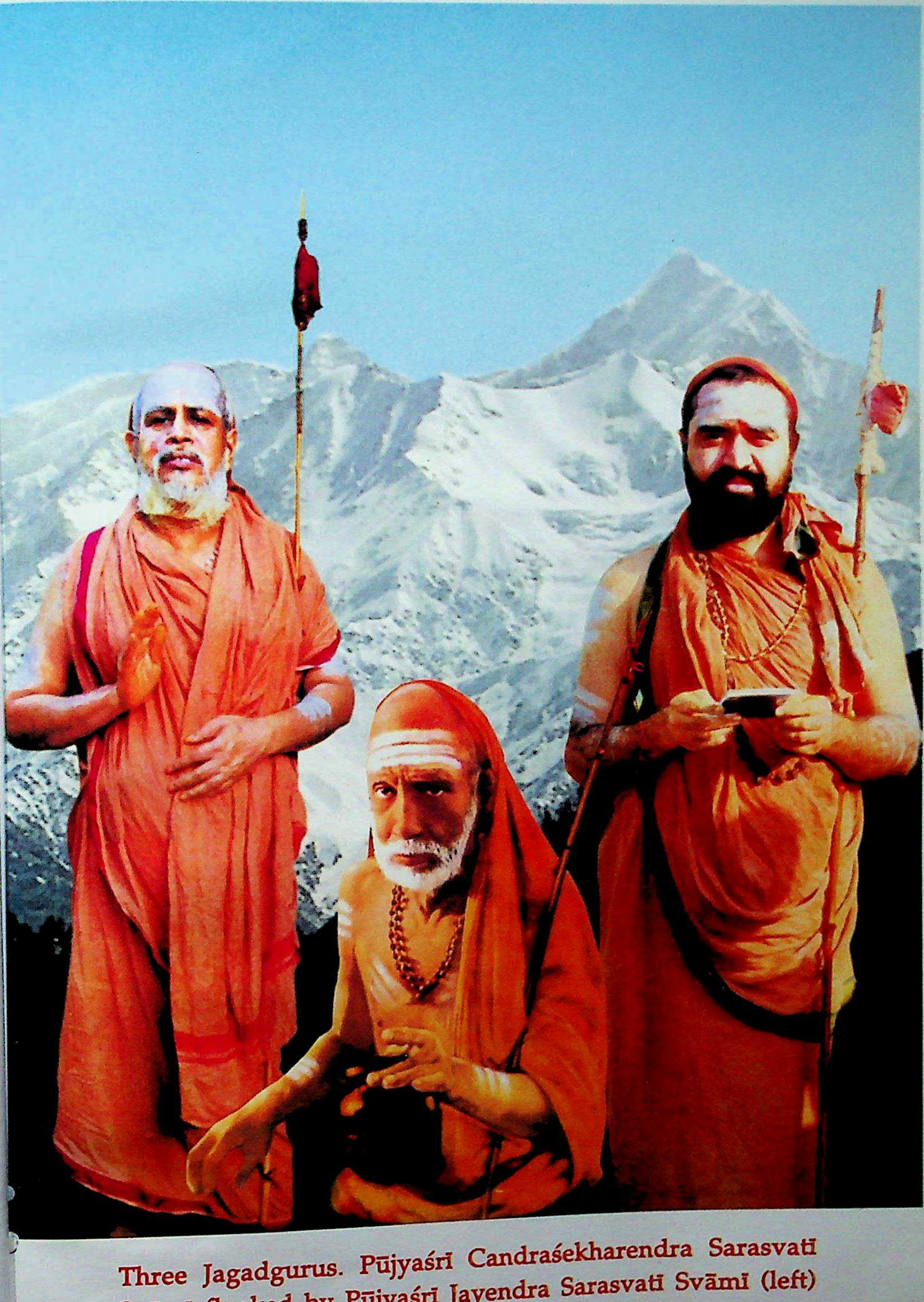


Śrī Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda with his disciples



Three Jagadgurus. Pūjyaśrī Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī Svāmī flanked by Pūjyaśrī Jayendra Sarasvatī Svāmī (left) and Pūjyaśrī Śaṅkara Vijayendra Sarasvatī Svāmī

Publisher's Note

This book comprises the discourses originally delivered in Tamil by Pūjyaśrī Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī Svāmī and included in Volume VI of *Deivattin Kural*, compiled and edited by Rā. Gaṇapati, and published by Vānadi Padippakam, Chennai.

The translation is by R.G.K. ... Revised by Gurukainkaryamaṇi Brahmaśrī A. Kuppuswāmī, an authority on the *Saundaryalaharī*.

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19th April 2001

FOREWORD

I consider it a privilege to write a foreword to this book which renders into English the lectures of the sage of Kāñcī, Śrī Śrī Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī Svāmigal, on the *Saundaryalaharī* of Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda.

Among the great works of Bhagavatpāda, ranging from mellifluent poetry imbued with bhakti to dialectical polemics, the *Saundaryalaharī* holds a unique place. It is a veritable confluence of bhakti, mantra, tantra and, in the final analysis, of Advaita itself. Each of its hundred verses has a distinctive significance from several standpoints. Several commentaries like Lakṣmīdharā, Saubhāgyavardhanī, Aruṇāmodinī and Ḍiṇḍima have attempted an exegesis of its one hundred verses. The quintessence could be brought out only by a realized soul like the Mahāsvāmī. Devī speaks through him. Indeed, at his level, there is no differentiation to be made between Devī, Guru and Śiṣya. The insight one derives into this brilliant composition of Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda through the lectures and explanations of the Great Sage is *sui generis*. In simple language, comprehensible to all, the Great Soul has illuminated the manifold aspects of the composition and made them radiant like facets of a brilliant diamond.

The translation into English by R.G.K. is a commendable job and is reminiscent of Kālidāsa's words, "Śruterivārtham Smṛtiranvagacchat".

Congratulations to the translator and the Bhāratīya Vidyā Bhavan for making available in English the insights of the Mahāsvāmī into the unique composition of the Great Master.

(B. N. Śrīkṛṣṇa)

Preface

A devout couple, Śivaguru and Āryāmbā, performed severe penance before Lord Śiva—Svayaṁbhū Liṅga, ensconced amidst the "ghee-rock" at the hoary Vadakkunnātha temple at Triśśūr, the cultural capital of Kerala, for the blessing of a son.

Pleased with the devotion of the ideal dampatī, the Lord appeared to them in a dream and gave them a difficult choice: whether they would wish to have a son long-lived but with average intellect or one brilliant but short-lived. They prayerfully preferred the latter.

Thus was Śaṅkara, the wonder-boy, born in Kālaṭi, a remote village in Kerala, the foot of India. He lived for just thirty-two years. But during this brief span of life, he did the work of several long lives. His powerful mind, piercing intellect, rich personality, ceaseless activity and manifold achievements were so astounding that he left an indelible impress on the minds and thoughts not only of his contemporaries, but also of succeeding generations, and it is very much in evidence even today. In fact, his name and fame, and profound thoughts and amazing organizing power, will influence the lives and work of untold generations to come. Verily they are immortal.

II

History provides the example of another outstanding personality, Alexander the Great, who also died when he was thirty-two.

One is struck by the polarity of power that existed in these two outstanding personages.

One was the son of a king; able, strong, powerful and thorough; the other, the son of a humble, pious Brahmin, no possessor of any worldly wealth or power worth the name.

Yet what a world of difference!

One is grudgingly remembered by students who have to cram their pages of history; the other, honoured, revered and eagerly studied by millions the world over.

One was the monarch of what mortal eyes could survey—men, wealth and territory; the other, the monarch of the mind, heart and spirit of men, too subtle for mortal eyes.

Why was the success and impact of the one ephemeral while that of the other eternal?

The answer lies in the motivating forces behind the careers of these two Greats.

One was fired by personal ambition to become the temporal leader of people and the ruler of the mundane world; the other, imbued with that divine compassion which exerts in the direction of providing enlightenment to the ignorant and suffering humanity, blossomed into a moral leader, a mentor of mankind and the spiritual ruler of the world. The former exemplified the success of physical power which is transient; the latter typified the triumph of soul-force, which is undying, everlasting. One became a World Conqueror for a brief time; the other a World Teacher—Jagadguru—for all time.

III

When Śaṅkara took birth, India was wallowing in the dark pit of decadence.

Buddhism and Jainism had lost their pristine glory. Corrupt practices had crept into the Buddhist fold and the vihāras tended to be no spiritual retreats at all. Later followers of the Buddha revelled more in the refutation of the doctrines of other faiths than in the inculcation of anything positive. Śūnyavāda had become something incapable of affording any constructive guidance to people.

Nor could people turn to the existing modes of Hinduism for solace and purposeful direction. In the name of the Vedas, the various sects of Hinduism had tried to propagate travesties rather than truths of the Vedic religion. The benign gods and goddesses were transformed into bloodthirsty ones, grovelling in the mire of sensuality and lust and demanding awesome, cruel and barbaric homage from their misguided devotees.

Śaṅkara had a panoramic view of all these when he wrote in his *Gītā Bhāṣya:*

atyanta-viruddhānekārthatvena gṛhyamāṇam upalabhya—"Finding the texts being interpreted in all sorts of contradictory and conflicting ways".

It was to silence the impostors who deliberately twisted the texts that he wrote the epoch-making *Prasthānatrayī Bhāṣya* and his other illuminating treatises.

The Bhagavatpāda's revolutionary and rational commentaries dealt a blow to the nihilistic Buddhists and the misinformed Hindu interpreters. Śaṅkara gave to the body of these texts the coherence of a system and thus won wide acceptance for his doctrine.

He was no escapist retiring into his shell or into a cave in the forest. A man of amazing energy and vast activity, Śaṅkara, in the words of Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, was "a curious mixture of a philosopher and a scholar, an agnostic and a mystic, a poet and a saint, and in addition to all this, a practical reformer and able organizer."

That invisible but strong bond unifying India, which is discernible to any student of Indian history, is the edifice built on the firm foundation of an intellectually unassailable and unified system of philosophy known as Advaita Vedānta.

Śaṅkara gave to the world the legacy of a beautiful, harmonized and strong fortress, wherefrom reverberates intellectual integrity, installed atop the fortress, a powerful *ākāśadīpa,* wherefrom radiates spiritual ardour, and surges forth soul-stirring devotional hymns like the *Bhaja Govindam, Saundaryalaharī, Śivānandalaharī, Kanakadhārā Stavam, Mīnākṣī Stotram, Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotram, Pāṇḍurangāṣṭakam, Annapūrṇā Stotram,* etc.

IV

This offering of Śrī Śaṅkara Bhagavatpādācārya's *Saundaryalaharī,* an exposition by the venerable Jagadguru Śrī Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī Svāmigal, the 68th Ācārya of Kāñcī Kāmakoṭi Pīṭha, is a flood of beauty that sweeps through various systems of thought. The Sage of Kāñcī was spiritually supreme, intellectually, pre-eminent. He was verily an *akṣayapātra*—inexhaustible reservoir—of the spiritual wisdom of India dating back to the beginning of Time and of Vedic Dharma. So was he with regard to modern knowledge, current affairs and contemporary men and matters.

The Mahāsvāmī's words of distilled wisdom originally delivered by him in Tamil and included in Volume VI of *Deivattin Kural,* compiled and edited by his ardent devotee Śrī Rā. Gaṇapati, and published by Vānadi Padippakam, Chennai, deserve our eternal gratitude.

This volume of nearly 650 pages has been rendered into English from Tamil by R.G.K. as a devoted labour of love. It is a monumental effort reflecting enormous, dedicated and unremitting labour over a long period of time. In translation, the transformation is normally from gold to lead but R.G.K. has ensured that the sheen of the original is retained. The Bhavan is beholden to R.G.K.

We are thankful to Justice Śrī B. N. Śrīkṛṣṇa, of Bombay High Court, for his illuminating Foreword.

We are also thankful to Śri Vankipuram Kṛṣṇamācāri, B.Sc., I.R.T.S. (Retd.), who prepared the Index in record time.

The Bhavan has had the privilege of publishing Pūjya Svāmiji's *Śrī Viṣṇusahasranāma Stotram, Hindu Dharma: The Universal Way of Life, Aspects of our Religion, The Vedas, Ādi Śaṅkara: His Life and Times* and *The Guru Tradition.* The Bhavan has also published *Kāñcī Mahāsvāmī on Poets and Poetry.*

This *Saundaryalaharī* is bound to be an immense source of inspiration to people, young and old, not only in India but all over the world, as well as to ardent devotees of Devī, to follow a life of values, of purity and sanity in personal and public life. This is our hope and prayer.

S. Rāmakṛṣṇan
General Editor
Bhavan's Book University

June 15, 2001
Mumbai.

Introduction

Ādi Śaṅkarācārya*

KERALA is the land of coconuts and bananas, of the ancient matrilineal system and of Nampūtiri Brahmins who, even among the Brahmins of India known for their learning and religious devotion for two millennia, are still one of the most orthodox, if not the most learned. It was the homeland of one of the greatest religious leaders in history.

Centuries ago, a boy, named Śaṅkara, was born at Kālaṭi to Śivaguru Vidyādhirāja and his wife Satī or Ambikā (Āryāmbā). He was a child prodigy. At the age of five, he was invested with the sacred thread, which accorded him the status of a Brahmin, and in almost no time he mastered the four Vedas.

Once, while Śaṅkara was bathing in the Pūrṇā river, his leg was caught in the jaws of a crocodile. Just as he was being dragged away, he asked his mother to permit him to become a sannyāsiṅ. The mother could not deny what seemed her son's dying wish. She agreed to his wish and he was miraculously saved from the crocodile. And Śaṅkara, at the age of eight, became a sannyāsiṅ.

In the moral, religious and spiritual evolution of man, inspired ascetics have, in the East as well as in the West, played a vital role. Their lives, more than their actions and words, have inspired millions to rise above the sordidness and vulgarity of animal existence and to walk on the path of godliness.

From preterhistoric times, India has been the home of many an ascetic order. The famous Mohenjo-daro seal dating back to at least 5000 years ago, depicts Paśupati sitting naked in a yogic pose. The Vedas mention long-haired ascetics — Lord Śiva sitting on Mount Kailāsa, besmeared with ashes, is appropriately their guardian deity. These orders have played a great part in recreating from time to time the religious life of the people and purging it of dross, and their influence has also spread to many other parts of the world.

According to tradition, the pre-eminent among these orders, was founded by Śukadeva, the ascetic son of Veda Vyāsa, who, as the foremost prophet of our race, and, as the author of the Mahābhārata, still dominates Hindu religion and thought. Later, Mahāvīra, who lived centuries before Christ, became the head of another ascetic, order, which still keeps Jainism alive. Again, the Buddha, in the same period, was the founder of still another ascetic order which today is prevalent in many countries in Asia from Śrī Lanka to Japan.

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* This essay by Kulapati K.M. Munshi is reproduced with a few changes from *Living Biographies of Great Religious Leaders*, a Bhavan's publication.

Śaṅkara was initiated into sannyāsa by Govindapāda, a very learned sannyāsin, who lived in a cave on the banks of the Narmadā.

Under Govindapāda, the child prodigy mastered all the religious and philosophical texts known at the time. At the same time he also became steeped in the doctrine of Advaita or non-dualism..

Hinduism, which time and again has influenced the religious life and thought of not only Asia but also the world has a harmonizing lesson derived from the *Prasthānatrayī*: three great scriptural works, the Śruti (the Vedas and the Upanīṣads), the Gītā and the *Brahmasūtra*. These ancient scriptures teach that the goal of life is liberation, that is, freedom from the fetters of ever-recurring birth and death and from the misery flowing from this cycle; that this goal can be attained only by realizing the Brahman, the Absolute, in individual life by means of super-sensory perception which can be developed only through bhakti or devotion, or jñāna, the cognition of Reality — or through karma, rituals or actions without greed, hate and fear.

Under the inspiration of his master Govindācārya, Śaṅkara, at the age of sixteen, reinterpreted the three great scriptures, the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavadgītā and the *Brahmasūtra*. His commentaries, characterized by profundity of thought and unassailable logic, recognise the Vedās as the supreme and infallible authority and expound the doctrine of absolute monism or Kevalādvaita which re-establishes the Ultimate Reality at the very centre of philosophic thought.

Śaṅkara's doctrine postulates four central doctrines :

First, the Brahman, the Absolute, is Reality, sat-cit-ānanda, existence, consciousness, and bliss. In the Absolute Brahman the distinction between the knower, the object known and the knowledge is dissolved.

Secondly, the only way of realizing the Brahman (i.e. sākṣātkāra) is jñāna, the cognition of the Reality. This cognition leads to the realization of the Absolute without the duality of happiness and misery, time and space. The world though not unreal so long as we are in it and of it, becomes irrelevant and illusory once we have the experience of the higher perception.

Thirdly, to attain this supreme realization of the Absolute, a fourfold path has to be followed : viveka, right discrimination between the permanent and the impermanent, the real and the unreal; vairāgya, detachment from the sensory attractions leading to the extinction of desire; śama, dama, uparati, titīkṣa, samādhi and śraddha — calmness, self-control, detachment, endurance, creative concentration and faith and, above all, mumukṣuta, the sustained urge to attain liberation and the resolute will to shed human limitations and realize the Absolute in life.

Fourthly, bhakti or devotion is only a step to secure the grace of God which will obliterate the distinction between the aspirant and God; and so is karma, action without attachment, or rituals, which bring that purity of mind which leads to the higher state of jñāna.

This revolutionary interpretation of the scriptures was a challenge to the Buddhist and the Jaina doctrines as well as to some of the Hindu cults that were at war with one another. It also helped to combat the gross worldliness engendered by the prevailing crisis of the spirit.

Śaṅkara, one of the greatest philosophers in history, was also a man of action. He was not content with teaching a new doctrine, he wanted to transform life in India.

In our land learning was the most honoured of attainments, right till it received the impact of the industrial West. Even in the age of Śaṅkara, religious and intellectual life in so vast a country as ours was highly organised. On account of the training and discipline which the Brahmins, as a community, received, the bulk of them were family priests, astrologers, or physicians in the villages and the towns and at royal courts. Besides there were those who specialised in grammar or literature, rituals, traditional history, logic and philosophy. They were of all grades, from a village teacher to the savant and the sannyāsiṅ who travelled from place to place and were received with high honours wherever they went. The eminent among such scholars, from time to time, met to hold debates under the patronage of royal courts, at which even learned kings presided, and the victors in such scholarly tournaments were given royal honours, and they were often carried in triumphal processions. But to be pre-eminent one had to receive recognition from the scholars who lived in a few centres of learning, of which Kaśī or Vārāṇasī, was the most notable.

Every Brahmin worth the name had a few students as members of his household, who for about twelve years sat at the feet of the master. The highest ambition of every brilliant student, once his studies were completed, was to go to Kāśī to secure some recognition and pursue still higher studies. Thus, this vast community of Brahmins, devoted to learning, had a sort of organic existence, the life-blood of which was supplied from Vārāṇasī. Even today, classical and scholastic study survives in this city as nowhere else in India.

Having evolved a religio-philsophic system that was a challenge to other prevailing doctrine, Śaṅkara, still in his teens, travelled to Kāśī.

It was not an age of books; manuscripts were a rarity. Scholars had classical authoritative texts at the tip of their tongue, and if they composed original works, they had to carry them in their memory. And in ceremonial debates on śastrarthas lasting for days, scholars had to wrestle with one another with great dialectical skill by marshalling authoritative texts, in addition to their own theses in Sanskrit, one of the most expressive and precise languages of the world.

Arriving in Vārāṇasī, Śaṅkara with supreme self-confidence, propounded his doctrine that Brahman, the Ultimate, is the only Reality. The scholars of the ancient city were as much moved by the power and eloquence of the young ascetic. The confusion created by other doctrines vanished before his incisive logic and each one fell in its proper place in a synthetic pattern. The three scriptural texts were consistent in their tenets, proclaimed Śankara; they all taught — Advaita Vedānta. Soon scholar after scholar accepted the challenge of the young sannyasiṅ, and were defeated in debate to become his disciple. Never was such a miraculous victory achieved by any scholar in tradition-bound Kāśī.

Śaṅkara's Advaita came to be understood even by the cāndāla, the lowliest among untouchables. On the road one of them met the young ascetic whose name was on the lips of every one; saw him instinctively shrinking away from his touch, and said to him : "You have established that the Absolute is everywhere, in you and me, and yet you shrink from me as if I am different". Śaṅkara, seeing the Absolute even in the lowliest of the lowly, bowed low with folded his hands as he would to a learned Brahmin. [He realized it was Śrī Parameśvara himself who had come in disguise to test him. — Editor]

Śaṅkara, then in his teens, had conquered Vārāṇasī and his fame had spread fast through all centres of learning. The country was ripe for an intellectual and moral revolution, and now its leader had arrived.

Kumārilabhaṭṭa was a giant of a dialectician of the day. He had begun life as a Buddhist scholar, but he had given up Buddhism, to become, with Śabarasvāmī and Manḍana, a great exponent of Mīmāṁsa, which taught that the Vedic Karma marga was the only way to liberation. As such, he had spent the mature years of his life, in overcoming the influence on Buddhist philosophy and logic amongst the intellectuals of the land.

Śaṅkara, therefore, travelled to Prayāga, possibly accompanied by a growing number of followers and challenged Kumārilabhaṭṭa to a debate. It was a very bold act, for Kumārilabhaṭṭa was a redoubtable dialectician. Śaṅkara remained undaunted by his intellectual prowess. 'Karma, performance of Vedic rituals, was a step towards purification of the mind of the individual on his way to liberation, Kumārilabhaṭṭa had preached.'

As it happened Kumārilabhaṭṭa was passing through a crisis. In his debates with the Buddhist scholars so far, he had argued on the hypothesis that Śruti was "self-authoritative". The great scholar was now convinced that Śruti was God-given and self-authoritative, and even to have argued about it as he had done was an unpardonable sin. Having decided to expiate for it by going through the ordeal of fire, he referred Śaṅkara to his pupil Maṇḍanamiśra, who was as formidable an exponent of Mīmāṁsa as the old master himself. [This story is somewhat at variance with the generally accepted version.—Editor]

Accompanied by a large number of disciples, Śaṅkara travelled from Prayāga to Mahiśmati on the Narmadā, also a great centre of learning, to engage Maṇḍanamiśra in debate.

Both Maṇḍanamiśra and his equally learned wife, Ubhaya Bhāratī, were held in the highest esteem by the scholars of the time, As tradition has it, "even the parrots in their home announced the infallibility of the Vedas". The challenge of the invincible Śaṅkara, therefore, was not only an event in the world of the learned, but an event that interested even ordinary people.

By common consent, Ubhaya Bhāratī was appointed judge. The debate between the young Śaṅkara and Maṇḍanamiśra lasted for days before an assembly of critical scholars. Ultimately, Ubhaya Bhāratī, with the impartiality of an uncommonly rare judge, declared Śaṅkara to have vanquished her husband.

Ubhaya Bhāratī next challenged Śaṅkara to a debate on kāma, a subject of which she had expert knowledge and young Śaṅkara none at all, strict celibate that he had been from boyhood. Then, says tradition, Śaṅkara asked for a month's adjournment of the debate. In the interval, by his yogic powers, he entered the body of the dying king Amaruka and mastered the mysteries of love. When the month expired, Śaṅkara returned to Mahiṣmati, carried on the debate with Ubhaya Bhāratī and vanquished her.

The Miśra daṁpatī had intellectual integrity of a high order. Maṇḍana became Śaṅkara's disciple and joined his ascetic order under the name of Sureśvara. Tradition is silent as to what happened to Ubhaya Bhāratī. However, Śaṅkara appears to have held her in deep veneration throughout life. To him, she was a living Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning, and as such he installed her in his maṭha, the monastic centre at Kāñcī. It appears from another tradition that, when she was dying, Śaṅkara, then a great yogin, kept back her spirit by his mystic power.

Śaṅkara, though an ascetic, was very human. He travelled to his native village during his mother's last moments in distant Kālaṭi, and was present there to bring cheer to her.

On Maṇḍanamiśra becoming his disciple, Śaṅkara emerged as the most formidable and authoritative exponent of sanātana dharma reawakened with absolute monism as its core. As he travelled from one centre of learning to another, he was honoured by the royal courts and the public as the pre-eminent leader among scholars and ascetics of his day.

Śaṅkara converted the gathering of scholars and disciples who accompanied him on his travels into a well organised peripatetic university. Besides, the Master, during his endless peregrinations, composed elaborate philosophic works. Some heterodox cults were being then followed in the country. Of them Mahāyāna Buddhism was still influential. But the vitality of Hinduism was slowly assimilating in its pantheon the personality of the Buddha whom even the Buddhists had come to regard as God. According to some texts, he was now the ninth incarnation of Viṣṇu, God in his preservative aspect. Kumārlia, Śabarasvāmī, and Maṇḍanamiśra had overcome the difficulties presented by the logical and ritualistic aspect of Hinduism. Śaṅkara's Vedānta obliterated its negative philosophic background.

Śaṅkara purified and harmonized the different sects and cults in various ways. In order to coordinate their activities, he popularized the worship of Pañcāyatana, five deities, each of which so far, had been the exclusive guardian deity of a separate cult. He had the poetic gift and in his hymns he sang the praises of all major deities, and in the process of lauding the greatness of each he read in each one of them some aspect of the Absolute, thus linking all cults with his Advaita. [Śaṅkara is also known to have established Ṣaṇmata, worship of six deities. - Editor.]

During the centuries which preceded Śaṅkara, political and social confusion and religious feuds had led to the domination of the Tāntrik practices which undermined the moral fabric of people.

The *Saundaryalaharī'* (Wave of Beauty), one of the major hymns of Śaṅkara, shows the typical magic by which he transformed the nature of Tāntrik worship of Devī or Śakti, the Feminine Principle being regarded as the supreme expression of Divinity. In this hymn Devi is accorded supreme position among the deities. She is even higher than her consort, Lord Śiva, in the hierarchy, though both are accepted as one in cosmic significance. The other gods, even of so high a status as Viṣṇu and Brahma, only subserve her purpose. And during the great dissolution of the universe, the only god to be saved is Śiva and that too because of Devi's wifely devotion to him.

Verse 34

You are the body of Śambhu with the sun
and moon as your pair of breasts,
your self I take to be the flawless self of
Bhava, O blessed lady;
hence, as you reciprocally realize each other
as complement and essence, this
union exists of you two experiencing
supreme bliss with equal savoir.

Verse 35

You are mind, you are space, you are wind,
you are the one fire for whom the wind is charioteer.
you are the cosmic waters, you are the earth;
when you are evolved into these forms,
there is nothing more.
You only, to effect evolution of yourself in the
form of the universe,
O young bride of Śiva, through your very
nature bear the form of consciousness and
bliss.

Despite the order in which the deities are placed here, the central theme of Advaita runs as a thread in the hymn. Devī is the Brahman with which all aspirants after liberation have to achieve complete identity.

Verse 22

"Do you, O lady (Bhavāni), extend to me, your
slave, a compassionate glance"—
when one desiring to praise you utters the
words "You, O lady" (which also mean, "May I be you"),
at that moment you grant him a state of identity with you,
with your feet illuminated by the crests of
Mukunda (Viṣṇu), Brahmā, and Indra.

In another hymn, Śaṅkara says : "Wherever or in whichever manner I keep my head, I find that your Divine Feet are there and my head is resting thereon in absolute submission."

In this way, step by step, Śaṅkara purified the different cults, however gross they were, and gave them the unity of Vedānta.

Sordid worldliness and decay of idealism, when they reach saturation point, have been known to create a revulsion in the collective mind of the race, particularly in India; that is how the doctrine of Cārvākam lost its hold long long, ago. There was revulsion against sense-enjoyment as a reality of life. Of this movement of the spirit, Śaṅkara was the highest expression and in a sense its architect.

His message of vairāgya, detachment from sense-attraction, became a rallying point for all who revolted against the prevailing grossness. His hymns conveying this message came to be sung in temples, religious gatherings, and even private homes.

One of Śaṅkara's hymns, sung in lilting rhythm, runs as follows :

Worship Govinda; Worship Govinda.
To Govinda alone offer your worship.

In the breasts and navels of women
Lies vanity, infatuation and delusion,
These are but the attraction of the flesh,
Ponder over it, again and yet again.

Worship Govinda; Worship Govinda,
To Govinda alone offer your worship.

You will be born again, and again you will die
And again you will enter the womb of a mother.
This existence is difficult to be crossed
Unless his grace comes to you.

Worship Govinda; Worship Govinda,
To Govinda alone offer your worship.

Your limbs will soon be trembling,
Your hair will be growing white,
Your mouth will be toothless,
You will totter forth with a staff in hand,
Yet the shackles of desire will leave you not.

Worship Govinda; Worship Govinda
To Govinda alone offer your worship.

Śaṅkara's triumph had lightning swiftness, but it was not easily achieved. Those who still clung exclusively to Vedic works, declared him to be a "Bauddha in disguise" — many learned and devout men then considered the Buddha to be the arch-heretic. Once Śaṅkara was caught by the Kāpālikas who worshipped Śiva with the performance of violent rites, and he was on the point of being offered in sacrifice. On another occasion, in what is now known as Assam, attempts were made to poison him. But every time a miracle saved him; nothing could hinder his triumphant career as an Advaitin.

Śaṅkara came to be recognised as a living deity. His personality and the miracles with which he was associated; his invincibility in debate with men of learning, his new philosophy integrating all the noble values of sanātana dharma; the religious and moral impulses that his evangelism released — all evoked admiration and provoked responses in royal courts, seats of learning and centres of religion.

Śaṅkara had come not only to found a school of philosophy or to preach a new doctrine. It was given to him to revitalise Hinduism. To give his movement of the spirit a steel frame, he reorganized the ancient order of ascetics, to which he belonged, into ten sub-orders, members of each having a distinctive name. Hence it was called *daśanāmī sampradāya,* the Order of Ten Names. He prescribed the vows and rules of each sub-order and established the system of democratic governance for each. He also reorganised the Kumbha

Mela, the great congregation held at Prayāga, where for centuries Indians have been going every twelve years to bathe at an appointed spot, where the waters of the Gaṅgā meet those of the Yamunā (and of the Sarasvatī).

Then came the last great act of Śaṅkara, giving institutional form to sanātana dharma. He established four maṭhas or monastic centres : at Badarikāśrama in the North, Dvārakā in the West, Jagannāth Pūri in the East, the fourth in the South at Śṛṅgeri, and the fifth at Kāñcī.

The head of each maṭha took the name of Śaṅkarācārya, and he was to be eminent in learning, pledged to strict ascetic vows and dedicated to preaching the Master's teachings. Besides these principal seats of learning, monastic institutes were founded at several other centres from where the light of Śaṅkara's message has been radiating for the past so many centuries.

At the age of thirty-two the Master's life came to an end. Śaṅkara's all-conquering tours across the length and breadth of India have come down to us in works called *Śaṅkara Vijayas*. Tradition says that he also travelled to Greater India, from Balkh to Cambodia (Kamboja). But the *Vijayas* leave most important things about him unsaid : how he attracted learned men; how he influenced the ordinary people; how he organised a powerful monastic order; how eminent men found self-fulfilment in following him; how thought, faith and rituals came to be revolutionised and how, in an all too brief a lifetime, he came to occupy a premier position as philosopher, inspired apostle and unique leader of men. If there was ever an empire-builder Śaṅkara was one. He had no armies, no money, not even a political battle to win. Yet he founded and left an empire of the Spirit which still flourishes.

As a result of Śaṅkara's mission, the three great scriptural texts — the Upaniśads, the Gītā and the *Brahmasūtra* — again became the living fountain of our spiritual life. Pāśupata Śaivism lost its grossness; Kāśmīri Śaivism took shape. Fearsome rituals gave place to detachment, purity and the sense of unity with God.

During the era of resistance when alien powers devastated North India and persecuted Hinduism, the daśanāmī sampradāya led the movement against vandalism, resisting all religious and cultural onslaughts. Sannyāsins were the spiritual guardians of Dharma. The yogins kept alive the torch of mysticism. The Nagas, by their mysterious asceticism, maintained uncompromising tenacity; the astradharīs or members of the fighting wing, defended shrines, women, cows and the social order.

The saga of the daśanāmīs are recorded in the songs and stories of the cult.

By the beginning of the 19th century, British rule had been firmly established in India. Religious freedom was an accepted tenet of the new foreign rule, so military adventure in defence of religion was no longer necessary. Another danger however appeared. In the wake of the British came the proselytising activities of Christian missionaries and the Westernisation of Indian youth. Many Westernised men and women lost sight of India's past greatness and the orthodox had no capacity left with which to draw fresh vitality from it. [Christian proselytization was known even before the British established their empire. — Editor]

The daśanāmīs prepared themselves to meet this new danger. The sannyāsins toured the country, teaching, inspiring and enabling the orthodox to revitalise their faith and helping the new generation to appreciate and interpret dharma. The mahants maintained centres of ancient learning and preserved the traditions of the ascetic orders.

In the early years of the 19th century, a blind daśanāmī sannyāsīn, named Virjananda, had a burning zeal to save dharma. His young disciple from Gujarat caught his guru's fiery enthusiasm and spent a lifetime in nourishing a powerful revolt against religious and social decay and political bondage. His mission found its fulfilment, first in the Ārya Samāj, then in the broadening spirit of Hinduism which his impact had aroused. It was left to Gandhījī, after fifty years to fulfil the programme that Dayānand had been the first to plan.

Totāpuri was a contemporary of Virjananda Sarasvatī. Rāmakṛṣṇa, his disciple, restored the mystic vitality of the dharma, purging it of its sectarian dross. Under his inspiration, religious, educational and philanthropic institutions have been founded. Missionaries, the most famous of whom was Vivekānanda, have gone out into the world on his behalf and by his authority. Dharma has re-assumed its universal aspect and has found expression in the integral gospel of Śrī Aurobindo and in the teachings of Ramaṇa Maharṣi.

The daśanāmi sampradāya, the hierarchy which Śaṅkara built, has continued to function. Thousands of sannyāsins still tour the country preaching Śaṅkara's gospel and numerous Gosvāmīs look after the maṭhas of the order. His hymns are still sung by the thousands in temples and homes throughout the country. The Śaṅkarācāryas of the five monastic centres still command the respect of the multitude. No thinker in India after Śaṅkara's time has escaped his influence — positively or negatively.

The Kumbha Mela, the congregation of the faithful reorganised by him, has become a permanent institution.

At the Kumbha, the congregation constitutes of millions. There are hundreds of camps of religious leaders of different sects and orders and of them Śaṅkara's Order has the highest number of representative ascetics. At the time each sub-order elects its chief for a period of twelve years in the way Śaṅkara had enjoined.

Thus, Śaṅkara lived and died as one of the greatest religious leaders of all time, an inspired ascetic, a saint, a poet, a philosopher, a religious reformer and a social and moral organiser. The stamp of his personality and his teachings is indelibly impressed on all. He gave Hinduism new life and a new direction. He built one of the greatest human organisations in his brief life of 32 years. He taught the human race that the aim of existence is to rise above the demands of the flesh, and to find, step by step and by conscious self-discipline, the supreme self-discipline, the supreme self-fulfilment, the realisation of the Absolute in life.

— K. M. Munshi

Key to Pronunciation

ā	(आ)	as in ācārya, vidyā, rājā
ī	(ई)	as in Īśvara, Sītā, Pārvatī
ū	(ऊ)	as in pūjya, dūra, vibhūti
ṛ	(ऋ)	as in Kṛṣṇa, Ṛgveda, gṛhastha
ḷ	(-)	as in kḷpta
ṁ	(-)	as in saṁskāra, Mīmāṁsā
ḥ	(:)	as in namaḥ, guruḥ, Rāmaḥ
kh	(ख)	as in khadga, śākhā, duḥkha
gh	(घ)	as in ghṛta, ghanapāṭhin, Māghā
ṅ	(ङ)	as in liṅga, paṅkti
c	(च)	as in caraṇa, ācāra, vacana
ch	(छ)	as in Chandas, Chāndogya
jh	(झ)	as in jhankāra
ñ	(ञ)	as in jñāna, Kāñcī
ṭ	(ट)	as in ṭīkā, ghaṭikā, Jaṭādhara
ṭh	(ठ)	as in pāṭha, maṭha, Kaṭhopaniṣad
ḍ	(ड)	as in ḍamaruka, paṇḍita, nāḍi
ḍh	(ढ)	as in ḍhakka
ṇ	(ण)	as in Kṛṣṇa, viṇa, bāṇa
th	(थ)	as in ratha, kathā
dh	(ध)	as in dhana, madhu, Rādhā
ph	(फ)	as in phala, kapha
bh	(भ)	as in bhāsa, abhaya, lābha
ś	(श)	as in śānti, Śiva, Śakti
ṣ	(ष)	as in Kṛṣṇa, bhāṣa, Upaniṣad
kṣ	(क्ष)	as in kṣamā, Lakṣmī, Kṣatriya
ṟṟ	(-)	as in *arangeṟṟam, kuṟṟam* (Tamil words)
ḷ	(ळ)	as in *aruḷ* (Tamiḷ word), Kāḷī, Vaḷḷuvar

For the Reader's Attention

Pūjyaśrī Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī Svāmī is referred to as "Mahāsvāmī", "Mahāguru", the "Great Ācārya", "Gurudeva", the "Great Master", the "Great Guru".....

"Ācārya" with a capital "A", unless otherwise indicated, means Śrī Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda.

Instead of "Brāhmaṇa" its anglicized form of "Brahmin" is used; similarly "Sanskrit" for "Saṁskṛtam" and "Tamiḷ" for "Tamizh".

What may be called "Hindi-ized" Sanskrit words like *"bhajan"* and *"darshan"* are italicized.

The word "Self" denotes the "Ātman" : this is in keeping with the generally accepted practice. "Jivātman" is referred to as the "individual Self".

"Sahasranāmam", unless otherwise specified, means the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam.*

No uniform style is adopted in the use of Sanskrit words; they occur either in their stem form or in the nominative singular.

Words put in square brackets and intended to explain a term or passage in the main text are added either by the compiler of the discourses or by the translator.

Words in the main text marked with a superior "g", for instance "Saguṇa Brahman^{g}", are included in the Glossary.

Hindu Dharma, referred to in the Notes & References, comprises discourses given by the Mahāsvāmī and published by the Bhāratīya Vidyā Bhavan.

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Chapter 1

The Ācārya—A Divine Incarnation

Ādi Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda whom we[1] adore as the "Ācārya" [the preceptor appearing in the middle of the Advaita Ācārya paraṁparā or lineage beginning with Sadāśiva, *i.e.* Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti] was an incarnation of the Lord Parameśvara. He was Dakṣiṇāmūrti[2] descended to earth, the god who remains in profound silence and in deep quiescence with all his power of jñāna drawn inward. If Dakṣiṇāmūrti is the ultimate in quietude, his incarnation Śaṅkara was ever active, engaged in writing commentaries[3], composing hymns[4], holding disputations with the learned and so on. If the one remained rooted to his place under the pīpal[5] tree without any action, the other was always on the move, journeying on foot, covering almost the entire Bhārata from Rāmeśvaram to Kailāsa.

The quiescent Brahman is Śiva, while the Brahman that has functions to perform, *i.e.* the Brahman that is active, is Śakti. It is through the jñāna manifested as energy that the phenomenal world functions. If the Ācārya accomplished so much in his brief life, it means that Ambā who had been latent in him as the energy of jñāna in his original form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti now found open expression through him. It follows that he was an incarnation of Īśvara and Ambā combined. We speak of mother, father and preceptor together (mātā, pitā, guru), don't we? Well, the World Mother and the World Father fused into one and became incarnate as the World Teacher, that is as Jagadguru Śaṅkarācārya.

Dakṣināmūrti who is quiescent inheres in himself Ambā, the active principle. Similarly, though the Ācārya was unceasingly involved in a variety of work, he was within himself all stillness and serenity. "What exists absolutely by Itself, as Itself, without any function to perform is the Brahman. Indeed this state of the Brahman is also the true nature of the individual Self (jīvātman)." It was Śaṅkara who established this monistic truth on an unshakeable foundation. He himself ever remained in this state experiencing the Brahman in himself.

Since he was born a mortal, he did much in the manner of a mortal, all the while remaining inwardly in his true state of the Brahman. In a dramatic performance a person has to enact the role assigned to him or her and never reveal his or her true self. A millionaire acting as Kucela[6] has to appear in rags. However movingly he fills his role, he knows that in reality he is not a poor man. Divine incarnations are to be understood in the same way: they are actors in this cosmic drama of ours. Inwardly they are never forgetful of their real selves but outwardly they "act" as if they have forgotten them, conducting themselves as they do like humans. It is for this reason that we describe divine incarnations like Kṛṣṇa Paramātman as "Māyā-mānuṣas", "Līlā-mānuṣavigrahas" and "Kapaṭa-nāṭaka-veṣas"[7]. Rāma was an avatāra of Mahāviṣṇu, but when Rāvaṇa abducted Sītā he gave way to grief like an ordinary mortal. He wept inconsolably when Lakṣmaṇa fainted on the battlefield in Laṅkā.

Why should divine incarnations act in this manner? The very purpose of their descent to earth is to set an example to mankind through their life and to show it the right path. Human beings have to advance step by step to reach the goal of fullness and they have to do so mindful of their limitations and without going violently against nature. It is to show them—that is men trapped in their natural urges and suffering on account of the same—how they can achieve their goal, to encourage them in their efforts and to instil in them confidence that the divine incarnations live and act like mortals.

In this manner the Ācārya also adopted the disguise of a mortal. He descended to earth to make mankind aware of the state of jñāna in which the entire universe will become nought and in which the mind will vanish without any trace of its existence. He took birth on this earth only to impart to humanity knowledge of the Advaitik Brahman, the One without a second. In order to be in accord with human nature, he accepted the world and the mind as if they were real but, at the same time, cut out a path for people to be taken step by step to the state in which these (the world and the mind) would cease to be.

There is a power that conducts everything. Since there exists nothing other than the Brahman it follows that the Great Power that carries out all functions inheres in It. If those who cannot meditate upon the Nirguṇa Brahman[8] turn their minds with devotion to this Great

Power they will eventually be able to obtain the jñāna of the true functionless and quiescent Brahman. Since the Brahman that conducts the affairs of the world itself blesses them with this jñāna, our Ācārya showed people the path of bhakti or devotion as a prelude to the path of jñāna. That is how he established the systems of worship of deities, collectively known as Ṣaṇmata, and composed a number of devotional hymns. He also went on pilgrimage to sacred places in every nook and corner of the land, installed yantras[g] in some temples and laid down rules to be followed in a number of shrines for the conduct of pūjā and other rituals.

Notes & References

[1] The "we" here refers to those who belong to the school of Advaita or non-dualism.

[2] A form of Śiva, he is the primordial guru.

[3] It is his commentaries or bhāṣyas and prakaraṇa works that chiefly enshrine the Ācārya's Advaitik thought. Those on the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavadgītā and the *Brahmasūtra*, collectively known as the Prasthānatrayī, are the more important among his bhāṣyas.

[4] The *Saundaryalaharī* is among the Ācārya's long devotional hymns. It is said that Śaṅkara composed more than 80 stotras or hymns but all of them cannot be claimed to have been authored by him. The hymns are addressed to deities such as Śiva, Gaṇeśa, Subrahmaṇya, Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Annapūrṇeśvarī, Lakṣmī, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and so on.

What are called the "prakaraṇa" works of Śaṅkara are also numerous: to mention just two of them, the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* and the *Upadeśasāhasrī*.

[5] *Ficus religiosa.*

[6] Better known as "Sudāma" in the North.

[7] These names are particularly applied to Kṛṣṇa and suggest how divine incarnations appear as a magical or illusory revelation of the Godhead, as sporting manifestations or as characters adopting the disguises of their roles in the cosmic drama.

Chapter 2

The Saundaryalaharī — The Crest of Devotional Poetry

Śaṅkara wrote numerous devotional works and the *Saundaryalaharī* remains the crest of all of them. What do ordinary people know about the Ācārya? Do they know that he wrote a commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*, that in it he establishes Advaita as the ultimate truth, that his is the last word on the subject? But one thing is certain: the very mention of his name brings to their mind a number of devotional poems authored by him, particularly two of them, the *Bhaja Govindam* and the *Saundaryalaharī*.

The *Saundaryalaharī*, as we said, is the crest of all the devotional poetry he composed; it also represents the śikhara (crest) of his poetic genius. The metre in which it is composed is appropriately called "Śikhariṇī" and it has 17 syllables per foot. Another metre with the same number of syllables is Mandākrāntā in which Kālidāsa has composed his *Meghadūtam*, a work full of poetic rasa^{g}. In this metre each foot is divided into sets of four, six and seven syllables, while in Śikhariṇī the division is into six and 11 syllables.

People learned in the arts of music and dance believe that better than tālas with an even number of beats are those that are "miśra" (mixed), *i.e.* combining an even number of beats with an odd number of them. The latter give greater aesthetic pleasure combining as they do two tempi — they impart verve to the music when it is needed through the fast tempo and the tranquillness needed for the same through the slow tempo. In the same way in poetry too there is greater beauty when the metre is divided into sets of syllables that are even and odd in number.

While the *Saundaryalaharī* is remarkable both for its poetic form and aesthetic beauty, its special distinction is that it is also a great devotional hymn.

Chapter 3

The Jñānin and Devotion

People nowadays view philosophy in isolation from other subjects. That is why they ask questions like this : "Is it possible for an exponent of Advaita like the Ācārya to have supported the way of devotion? It's all bunkum. Hymns composed by someone else must have been ascribed to him. The Ācārya could not have also installed anything like yantras[g] anywhere." We must remember that our Ācārya was not like a professor; he did not teach philosophy as an independent subject. His mission was to raise people up including those not capable of grasping philosophy, lift them up little by little according to their different levels of maturity and understanding. To those who were capable of taking the path of jñāna he imparted instruction in a thorough manner through his commentaries and prakaraṇa works. But others he taught devotion exhorting them to follow a life of karma or action or action in accordance with their svadharma[g]. In pursuance of this he visited various sacred places, installed idols and yantras there and composed hymns to the deities.

We often hear people arguing thus: "The man who believes that all is one is a jñānin. Devotion implies that God and his devotee are two different entities. So a jñānin can never be a devotee." People who speak thus cannot claim that they have realized monistic jñāna! Think of Śukabrahman[g] who was a true Advaitik jñānin. What was he like? Or take the examples of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī and Sadāśiva Brahmendra[g]. They were jñānins but at the same time they were supreme devotees; in fact they have even authored devotional hymns. Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahaṁsa, for example, accepted Advaita, but all the while he kept chanting, "Kāḷi! Kāḷi!" In recent years we have had the example of Ramaṇa Maharṣi, a great Advaitin, who sang the praises of Aruṇācaleśvara.

There were also saint-poets like Māṇikkavācakar, Nammāzhvār, Aruṇagirināthar, and Tāyumānavar[g] whose hearts melted in devotion; but in their devout outpourings there appear flashes of the Advaitik bliss they experienced.

If it is argued that a jñānin would not or should not compose a devotional work, I would say he should not compose a work on jñāna either. If the logic of the former view is accepted I would say that all those who have written works on jñāna or taught jñāna are not jñānins. Why do I say so? How do you identify a jñānin? "All this world is nothing but Māyā. Becuase of their nescience it is that people regard themselves as individual jīvātmans [that is each thinks that he is a separate entity]". It is out of a realisation of this truth that a jñānin tries to free himself from the world and the mind that gives rise to such nescience so as to remain rooted in his Self and to identify it with all in the awareness that there is no second. If such a jñānin were to be a teacher, write books and give discourses—even if the books and discourses relate to jñāna—can his action be justified? There is a real world outside of him, and apart from him there exist many jīvātmans as separate entities : does he have to think thus if he were to lift up the world that is apart from him by imparting jñāna to people through his writings and discourses? It would mean that all preceptors of jñāna were not truly jñānins. But can we take such a view? Would it not be blasphemous to do so? What would then be the power of the teaching imparted by men lacking in jñāna? What would be the power of one who has no inward experience of the Truth?

What is our own experience in this respect? Take the chapters on jñāna in the Bhagavadgītā, for example, or our Ācārya's *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi,* the *Avadhūtagītā* of Dattātreya, the *Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha* of Vasiṣṭha, or, say, a hymn by Tāyumānavar. When we read any of them we are transported across Māyā to an indefinable realm in the ocean of tranquillity.

There are examples of individuals who, after reading such works, have had the urge to leave hearth and home for the forest or for a cave in a mountain to remain there in solitude, delighting themselves in the Ātman. If the authors of the works in question had not composed them without having experienced the Supreme Reality how could their teaching have the power to move people?

For argument's sake it could be asked how it is possible for a jñānin to become a devout person or for him to become a teacher to impart instruction in jñāna. Even if this may appear not possible we must remember that the sport of Īśvara is such that there are no limits in it for what is possible and what is not possible — in it such things (like a jñānin becoming a devout person and a teacher) do happen.

If you ask how a jñānin who remains an Advaitin inwardly seems to function as a Dvaitin (dualist) outwardly, we can reply only by saying that it is all part of the divine sport. Even if he has been freed of his mind and of Māyā it does not mean that the outward world and with it the cosmos of living creatures have become extinct. What does this show? It is a Great Mind that has created all this, laid down rules to keep the cosmos in a certain order and, at the same time, it is the same Great Mind that helps people under the sway of Māyā, letting them act according to their whims. It is this power that the monistic system calls the Saguṇa Brahman[g], Īśvara. In the Śākta and Śaiva systems it is called Śakti, Parāśakti, Ambā, while the Nirguṇa Brahman[g] is called Śivam. Just as the Nirguṇa Brahman functions as the Saguṇa Brahman in the outward world of karma, the jñānin who has achieved perfection in his experience of the Nirguṇa Brahman is kept engaged in the outward world by the Saguṇa Brahman.

To endeavour to dispel Māyā and to obliterate the mind through meditation and inward inquiry is the path of jñāna. Another path is that of dedicating the same mind in a devout manner to Parāśakti who has created this very mind and Māyā. It is like handing the keys to the thief! Parāśakti is the cause of Māyā and she keeps our minds relentlessly under her sway. But it is all part of her sport and in reality she is supremely compassionate. It is when two entities are joined together again after having been separated from each other that they realize the rare quality of togetherness, what a great experience togetherness is. When an individual prays for being united with the Supreme there is a twofold aesthetic experience of a divine nature: There is, apart from the rasa[g] of devotion arising from the very act of prayer, the rasa of the grace of Parāśakti who, in response to the prayer and out of her supreme love, brings about such a union. It is for this reason that Parāśakti engages herself in dualistic play. So when a man is devoted to her, and prays to her for release from worldly existence (Māyā), she blesses him with the milk of jñāna; indeed he is blessed with the ultimate freedom.

There is an erroneous belief that the goal of bhakti is to become separated from the Lord and to worship him in an attitude of dualism. That is why people ask how a jñānin (a non-dualist) can follow the path of devotion. They are not aware of the fact that even in such bhakti as in which the Lord and the devotee are separate entities the latter will eventually be taken to the state in which he will be able to pray thus: "Without ever being separated from you, Lord, I must become one with you." When he reaches such a state the Kārya Brahman or the Saguṇa Brahman that is Parāśakti will bless him with the jñāna that will take him to the monistic entity called the Kāraṇa Brahman or the Nirguṇa Brahman.

For those who are not capable of following the path of jñāna, the jñānin himself has an answer. He knows that they have to obtain jñāna as the grace of Īśvara which they have to earn by being constantly devoted to him. And it is for their benefit [to help them in their bhakti] that he composes devotional poems and installs yantras. Besides he codifies methods of pūjā, himself performs pūjā, encourages the construction of temples, and the digging of ponds [for the benefit of the public].

All cannot adopt with ease the path of jñāna which involves realizing the truth of the Mahāvākyas[8] that proclaim the non-difference between the Brahman and the individual Self. This realisation comes as a result of listening to expositions of the Advaitik discipline, dhyāna (meditation) and nididhyāsana (fervent one-pointed meditation). To become aware that the Ātman is the Brahman, the mind must be obliterated: but how it is to be done one does not know. The mind is stubborn and refuses to be destroyed. It seems that the effort to annihilate the mind has to be taken by the mind itself. How can it put an end to itself by itself? You can beat someone with the palm of your hand. But how can the palm beat itself? Even though we are perplexed, not able to understand anything, don't we realize that there must be a Great Power that has created all these minds? So, instead of undertaking the Herculean task of eradicating our minds ourselves, it would be better for us to depend on Parāśakti herself to do the same for us. For this purpose we must fall at her feet and pray to her to bless us with jñāna. Is it not better to fall at the feet of the man who has issued the summons than to fall at the feet of the witness?

Either Parāśakti will do away with our mind and bestow on us her own profoundly serene state of Śiva—the state in which each knows himself to be Śiva ("Śivo'ham"). Or she will tell us: "Is not all this my sport? It is because of Māyā that the sport has ended in an injury. I will suppress this Māyā, wipe it away. Then, like me, you will inwardly remain in the state of 'śāntam, Śivam, Advaitam' and, outwardly, with a pure mind untouched by Māyā, you will delight yourself in all that I do, in all my dance, in all the drama I enact, and you can yourself keep dancing in ecstasy. Remain ever in bliss, seeing yourself in me, and seeing me in all this cosmic drama. And even though the mind is not eradicated it will have a fullness of its own."

If you keep lamenting and feel a sense of shame that, try as you might, you have not succeeded in freeing yourself from the clutches of Māyā and that your mind has not been blotted out, Parāśakti will tell you: "Why do you weep, child? Why are you overcome by shame? Is it because the world has not ceased to exist for you? It is only if you have created the world that you can destroy it. Did you create the sun and the moon, the mountains, the trees and creepers, the oceans, the insects, the birds and the beasts, the hundreds of thousands of creatures, the human species? If you did not create all these why do you keep sorrowing over such a tiny thing as 'yourself'? Was this 'you' created by you? Did you create this Māyā which blinds you to the fact that all these things that seem to be different entities are in fact my disguises? Child, the world and the mind in which you are trapped and in which you find yourself helpless and the Māyā in which is caught what is called 'you' are all my creations. Haven't I spoken through Kṛṣṇa[1], 'Mama Māyā duratyayā'? I have also used in the same context the word 'daivī' [caused by divine power]. If these (the world, the mind and Māyā) are your creation, you will be able to undo them. But if they have been created by me? And I possess divine power to the full. In my sport I alone am omnipotent (possessing sarva-śakti) and beings like you are kiñcit-śaktas (those possessing very little power). So why should you grieve over the fact, or feel a sense of shame, that you cannot destroy what was created by me, Māyā, the mind and the world? Such a task (destroying Māyā, the mind and the world) is beyond you and it can be accomplished only with my compassion. What have been created by me must be destroyed by me. Come to me with devotion. I will destroy them (Māyā, the mind and the world) little by little.

"If a man controls his mind and senses and follows the path of jñāna it is because of my grace, because I allow him [or enable him] to do so. Giving up what appear as separate entities and to have the longing to grasp the One and to become that One : they are part of Advaitik vāsanā[g] and the result of my blessing[2]."

[So far the Great Ācārya spoke the words of Ambikā. Now he continues, in his own words.] One more interesting point. The jñānin, who has non-dualistic experience and has become one with all also witnesses the play of Māyā and delights himself in it. He can discern things as separate entities and at the same time realise that it is the One that has become the many (the separate entities). Without taking part in the play himself, he finds great delight in it and keeps worshipping Parāśakti who enacts the play. It is Ambā who is the cause of his being like herself and of his being by her side dualistically and non-dualistically at the same time. There is a point to be noted in this context. The jñānin here evinces devotion not only for the sake of those who do not follow the path of jñāna. He is lost in wonder about how the One without a second plays dualistically in so many different ways. In this sport though there are aspects that can cause harm there is so much that is beneficent—and what about the many different ways in which beauty, love and compassion are manifested? The jñānin is not only lost in wonder about all this, he also extols the divine play and delights in it and whole-heartedly pays obeisance to the One who is sporting, that is Śakti. Śukācārya[g] clearly echoes the same sentiment. If a devotee who is not a jñānin adores the Lord in pursuance of his selfish desire for liberation, the jñānin who is freed from Māyā and is liberated evinces devotion for the sake of devotion and not for any purpose [not with any motive]. Śukācārya pays a tribute to the jñānin in this manner.

[The Great Master again speaks the words of Ambikā ....] "It is I who give the jñānin a new kind of devotion in his jñāna itself. When the time is ripe I will give you too the jñāna that arises from bhakti. Why do you grieve? I will take care of you. I will free you from the bonds that I myself have created. Don't lament, saying, 'I want to be freed! I want to be freed! I want to be freed!' It is all my work. Be firm in the belief that I am present in everything. If I am everything, if I am all, there is no need for you to be freed from anything.

"Those who follow the path of jñāna and are engaged in metaphysical inquiry can obtain the peace that comes of an awareness of the oneness of all. Let them go their way. If you do not possess the strength to follow their path, child, do not be ashamed of yourself on that account. Take the path of devotion, love. See the world in all its apparent plurality. But do not, at the same time, view the many as separate entities and realise that they are basically the One entity that is I. Love me and view everything with love and may this love be all-embracing. I too will bestow on you the most exalted blessing that love can bring and thereby raise you to the state of jñāna." Thus even if you follow the path of bhakti, Ambā will bring you fulfilment.

Ambā here means the Paramātman, God or one's chosen deity.

Such Parabrahma-Śakti as described above will manifest herself as Māyā; she will bless the devout in her saguṇa form; and in her nirguṇa form she will liberate the one adhering to jñāna; and through bhakti itself she will enable a person to become a jñānin.

In sum, if it is asked whether one who has written a work of jñāna will compose a devotional hymn, it occurs to me that it is only because one has written a work of jñāna that one must necessarily have composed a devotional hymn. Only then, I am inclined to conclude, can the individual in question be called an Ācārya. If our Ācārya who, even after having had Advaitik realization, viewed others to be different from himself—or gave the impression of doing so—and wrote works on jñāna meant for them, it means that he did so accepting the dualistic cosmos and, at the same time, wanting to correct it. Was not this the very purpose of his incarnation, of his being our Ācārya? One who imparts teaching to those ensnared in the dualistic world—would not such a one teach them to adore the Śakti that is responsible for it? Is it not because of his concern for the world, his compassion for mankind, that he imparts his teaching that is meant to mend it? So will he not sing the praises of that which is the root cause of all this love, "dayā-mūla-tattvam?" A jñānin does not have to gain anything. But when he resolves to perform the role of a teacher for the uplift of the world, will he not recognize that some force beyond him is impelling him to do so? So there is nothing contradictory about his composing hymns, bowing to that force in all humility.

That a jñānin gives instruction in jñāna is purely our own view of him or impression of him; as a matter of fact he has no consciousness of doing anything or of being a "doer". If you argue in this manner, it may justly be asked how the jñānin cannot also write devotional works. If it is claimed that the jñānin imparts his teaching, inspired by Īśvara, for the well-being of the world, that is the well-being of mankind, why cannot he be similarly urged by the Lord to compose devotional works for the same purpose? If Īśvara inspires a jñānin to work for the welfare of mankind until he exhausts his past or prārabdha karma, we must ask whether such well-being is brought about only by giving instruction in jñāna. The majority of people are afraid of following the path of jñāna regarding it as too "big" or too difficult for them. So working for the good of mankind must also mean promoting devotion. It must also mean going on pilgrimage to temples, installing yantras[g], performing pūjā and so on.

According to one school of thought the jñānin has no prārabdha or past karma. Even if you accept such a view, the question arises why he should perform outward work at all? We have to answer the question by saying that it is Īśvara who makes him do such work for the well-being of mankind. In keeping with this argument this work must also include the nurturing of devotion.

Having said all this there is nothing that is conclusively to be determined about the jñānin. Though we have spoken so much about his characteristics, the fact is only a jñānin knows who is a jñānin, what he is like—or even he himself may not know what he is like. In the end it is meaningless to ask whether the jñānin will support the path of karma or foster the way of bhakti. He may do anything or he may not do anything. Even while doing karma he may not be doing work and even while not working he may be working. [The Great Guru continues with a smile...] The distinguishing mark of a jñānin is that he has no distinguishing mark.

As for the Ācārya he was an incarnation of Īśvara, so he had nothing like any past karma. All divine incarnations happen for the purpose of the uplift of mankind. Whenever Īśvara resolves to descend to earth for the uplift of mankind it means that he looks upon the world as separate from himself. The purpose of his incarnation is to bring people who are separate entities closer to himself, little by little, and finally to make them himself. It is only after a man performs works according to his svadharma[g] (or own duty) and engages himself in devotion, and thus advances gradually, that he will be able to follow the path of jñāna and become an Advaitin (achieve liberation). So a divine incarnation has to foster the path of karma as well as the path of devotion. All avatāras have lived as pathfinders for mankind, and fostered Vedic karma and devotion. So there is no contradiction in the fact that the Ācārya was a jñānin and that he yet worshipped in temples, installed yantras, laid down rules for temple rituals and composed devotional works.

References

[1] Daivī hyeṣa guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā
Mām eva ye prapadyante māyām etam taranti te
— Bhagavadgītā, 7.14

[2] Īśvarānugrahādeva puṁsām Advaita-vāsanā
— Avadhūtagītā, 1.1

[3] Although the saints and the seers keep sporting in their Ātman and are without any attachment, they remain devoted to the Lord for no reason whatsoever.
— Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, 1.7.10

Chapter 4

The Divine Origin of the "Saundarylaharī"

Our Ācārya worshipped in temples in the same way as ordinary mortals do and, through his godly power, enhanced the divine presence in some of these shrines by installing yantras[8] in them. In the course of his pilgrimages he went to Kailāsa and had *darshan* of Pārvatī and Parameśvara there. He was himself [let us remember] their incarnation.

Rāma, an avatāra himself, fought with Paraśurāma who too was an avatāra like him. Kṛṣṇa was the brother of another incarnation [of Viṣṇu], Balarāma, and they lived together. There are many such interesting facts about avatāras.

Now the Ācārya who was an avatāra himself had *darshan* of Pārvatī and Parameśvara—the two were the Root from which he himself had sprung. At that time Parameśvara gave him five sphaṭika (crystal) liṅgas and a sheaf of palm-leaves. Another version has it that the palm-leaves were given by Pārvatī. The palm-leaf manuscript contained a hymn of one hundred[1] stanzas to Pārvatī. One version has it that it had been composed by Parameśvara himself as a panegyric to Pārvatī; the second version is that like the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam* (The One Thousand Names of Lalitā) it is the work of Vaśini and others, the deities of speech. To regard the verses as a hymn sung by Parameśvara himself in the attitude of a devotee of Ambā is to enhance their greatness.

The five liṅgas are each of them Īśvara's own form. ["Liṅga" means a mark, a sign.] The liṅga has no hands, legs and head and in that sense is formless. The stanzas of the palm-leaf manuscript themselves constitute Ambā. It is so because among the goddess's many forms is the one that is made up of mantras. The hundred stanzas contained chiefly matters relating to Ambā and mantra śāstra. Just as the liṅgas are a form of Īśvara, the palm-leaves containing the hymn became a form of Ambā. So it is just and proper to say that while the liṅgas were given to the Ācārya by Īśvara, the hymn was presented to him by Ambā.

The one who gave, the one who received, the object that was given, they were all one and the same. Here we have a mingling of Advaita and Dvaita.

One of the five liṅgas is installed in the Maṭha [Śrī Kāmakoṭi, Kāñcī] as Candramaulīśvara. It is called the Yogaliṅga. The other four the Ācārya installed are the Muktiliṅga at Kedārinātha (Kedārnāth), the Varaliṅga at Nīlakaṇṭha (in Nepāl), the Bhogaliṅga in Śṛṅgerī and the Mokṣaliṅga at Cidaṁbaraṁ. All this is part of a later story.

The Ācārya set out from Kailāsa taking with him the five liṅgas and the hymnal work. He wanted to propagate the worship of Īśvara and Ambā. As he was leaving Kailāsa, Nandikeśvara who was keeping watch at the entrance saw the palm-leaves in the hands of the Ācārya. There is a saying: Even if the deity grants you a boon, the *pūjāri* denies it. Nandikeśvara was distressed that the mantra śāstra, a very great treasure, was being lost to Kailāsa. He was given to quick temper. His distress turned into anger. (Tāpa became kopa.) He proved an obstruction to the Ācārya as the latter was leaving Kailāsa and pulled at the palm-leaf manuscript he was holding in his hand.

The Ācārya managed to come out with only a part of the manuscript. More than half of it, the latter part comprising 59 stanzas, had been snatched away by Nandikeśvara. The Ācārya was left with 41 stanzas.

Perhaps you must be angry with Nandikeśvara for what he did. "How could he have behaved so with such a great one as the Ācārya?" you will ask. How could he take away more than half the work Ambā herself had given the Ācārya to be propagated on earth?" But I feel like thanking Nandikeśvara profusely. Why?

The Ācārya was extremely unhappy about what had happened. "More than half of what Ambā, the Mother, gave me in her grace I have lost. What she entrusted to me was like the dhārmik treasure a trustee takes charge of for the sake of the people," thus the Ācārya lamented. "Śaṅkaram loka-śaṅkaraṁ" : [true to these words] he was spending every moment of his life for the well-being of mankind. "In the end," he grieved, "I have lost more than half of what the World Mother gave me before I could present it to the world."

At that moment was heard the voice of Ambā commanding him, "You compose yourself the 59 stanzas you have lost. Such is my resolve. That is what will please me. And that is why I made you lose the same." At once the stanzas poured out from the Ācārya like water gushing out as the sluice-gates of an oceanic canal are opened. He described Ambā from head to foot ("keśādi-pādāntam")[g] and made the hymn complete with its 100 stanzas.

The first 41 stanzas constitute mantra śāstra. Only a few can understand them and follow them in practice since very stringent rules are called for in their observance. This part (comprising the 41 stanzas) contains mantra yoga as well as Kuṇḍalinī yoga. Even the slightest error in the observance of these yogas can have an adverse effect on the practitioner. One cannot be careless in worshipping the Mother. She sports in many ways. Though she has laid down harsh rules for worship, involving severe discipline, she has also prescribed easy ways of sādhana[g]. Each way of worship has to be practised strictly in the manner prescribed. Worshipping in temples, reciting stotras or hymns, singing devotional musical compositions, conducting *bhajans*, listening to stories, purāṇas, these are among the easy ways of worshipping Ambā. If a devotee thinks that these are not enough and wants to take up other ways of worship like japa[g], yoga and Śrīcakra-pūjā, believing that he can practise them in any manner he likes, without the required discipline, Ambā would consider it sheer wantonness on his part. The difficult ways of sādhana in the worship of Ambā must be left to those few who are capable of practising them.

The Ācārya's compassion was supreme and it embraced all people. There is a song[3] in Kannaḍa which includes this line about him : "He (Śaṅkara) made the sinner the Paramātman." The Ācārya portrays Ambā in his 59 stanzas not as an embodiment of mantras but as a beautiful form that can be visualised by all people with delight. He depicts the goddess graphically from the locks of her hair to her sacred feet (keśādi-pādāntaṁ). The glorious image of the Mother takes shape through his poetry : in other words Ambā is his poetry incarnate.

The 59 of the 100 stanzas constitute a separate section, "Saundaryalaharī", while the first 41 are said to constitute "Ānandalaharī".

The two parts comprising the 100 stanzas must be read together as making up a single hymn. When the work is taken as a whole the first part is called "Ānandalaharī" and the second part "Saundaryalaharī". The entire work, consisting of both parts, is also called *Saundaryalaharī.*

The story I told you of the Ācārya's visit to Kailāsa and his obtaining from Pārvatī and Parameśvara the five liṅgas and the sheaf of palm-leaves containing the *Saundaryalaharī* occurs in the *Mārkaṇḍeya-Saṁhitā.* Closely following this account, the *Ānandagirīya-Śaṅkaravijayam* tells the same story in prose.

There are other stories too about the origin of the *Saundaryalaharī.* Many are of the opinion that all the 100 stanzas are the work of Śaṅkara himself[4].

There is nothing wrong in ascribing the entire work to him even if we think that the first 41 stanzas were brought by him from Kailāsa. These stanzas had been inaccessible to us. The ṛṣis did not create the Vedic mantras. The sounds that were already existing in space they grasped and presented in a form audible to us; at the same time they also disseminated them. However, each mantra is known after a particular ṛṣi on account of the fact that it was revealed to us and propagated by him. Following this logic the first 41 stanzas of the *Saundaryalaharī* which constitute a mantra śāstra may well be known after Śaṅkara since it was he who brought them from Kailāsa to be propagated in this world.

Another point. If Parameśvara is the author of the *Saundaryalaharī,* what about the Ācārya? Who was he? Was not the Śaṅkara of Kālaṭi an incarnation of the Śaṅkara of Kailāsa? So there is nothing wrong in ascribing the work by the Kailāsa Śaṅkara to the Kālaṭi Śaṅkara.

The first 41 stanzas deal with subtle ideas of mantra śāstra, Kuṇḍalinī yoga and the esoteric elements in the worship of Mahā-Tripurasundarī, also known as Śrīvidyā. It contains matters that are extremely useful to the devotee. However, the latter part comprising the 59 stanzas, the authorship of which is ascribed to the Ācārya, is beautiful beyond words. The stanzas combine majesty and sweetness of expression, representing as they do the highest thoughts that words can convey and they arouse our sense of wonder. They are incomparable for beauty of expression and depth of meaning. It is this part that can be read again and again by all for the ineffable joy it brings.

There are sculptures of exquisite beauty created in the past. People belonging to later generations have found themselves unable to repair them if they are seen damaged. Such is the case with the stanzas of our Ācārya's *Saundaryalaharī.* Take out one word of it, you will never be able to find a proper substitute for it.

What the Ācārya lost to Nandikeśvara — more than half of the original hymn Ambā had given him—has been a gain for us. Otherwise would we have come to know of the Ācārya's astounding literary genius? That is why we feel we must be thankful to Nandikeśvara. If the Ācārya had not been "waylaid" by him and a part of the hymn snatched away, would we have come to possess such stanzas as inspire in us devotion for Ambā, stanzas that we read again and again and take delight in reciting ?

Notes & References

[1] Most of the Northern versions of the work have 103 stanzas and the majority of the commentators also have dealt with these additional Ślokas. Stanza 101 begins with the words "Samānītaḥ padmām"; 102 with the word "Samudbhūta"; and 103 with "Nidhe nityasmere." It is to be noted that all the words in the 103rd stanza begin with "ni" — *vide* Appendix.

[2] Strictly speaking "keśādi-pādāntam" means from the hair on the head to the feet.

[3] "Maṅgalam guru Śaṅkara" is the song.

[4] The Mahāsvāmī himself usually speaks of the first 41 stanzas also as the work of Ādi Śaṅkara. Here too, in these discourses, we find the same view expressed.

Chapter 5

Why the Drama Enacted by Nandikeśvara?

The question arises: "Why should Ambā have given the Ācārya the text of an old hymn, made him lose one part of it and have the portion thus lost made up with the verses composed by the Ācārya himself? Could she not have bidden him compose an entire hymn afresh? Also, why should she have given him a work of which only one part was to be made available to the world?" We have no idea of the nature of her resolve, nor do we understand her līlā, her sport. But some reasons occur to me.

There are two ways of worshipping Ambā. Mantra yoga is one. The other is devotion expressed through hymns that satisfy all the criteria of great poetry. Practitioners of mantra yoga must not look down upon those who read or sing hymns. "Like us do they follow a severe discipline or observe rules of worship?'' They should not speak thus of people singing hymns, people of simple faith and devotion. As for those who follow the path of bhakti, those who keep singing hymns, they should not ask questions in this manner of the practitioners of mantra yoga: "Like us they cannot see the World Mother with love, chanting always 'O Mother'. Nor can they fix their minds on her, experiencing with poetic delight the beauty of her form, her diverse enchantments, the different ways in which she sports? What is this drab and arid path they follow of mantra and tantra?"

There are different paths of worship for people with different attitudes. The man who practises mantra and tantra may also like to adore Ambā through devotional poetry. So Ambā must have thought that it would be desirable to have a work which could be read by people following either path. Even those who have not received initiation into mantra yoga can benefit to some degree by reading the 41 stanzas forming the first part of the Kailāsa hymn. Also they will gain basic knowledge of mantra śāstra, Kuṇḍalinī yoga, Śrīvidyā and such ancient subjects that form part of our nation's spiritual wealth. It must have been thought proper to have a single work incorporating all these elements, a melodious devotional hymn of poetic excellence.

It may be asked why Ambā did not bid the Ācārya himself to compose a new hymn combining both (mantra śāstra and devotion). After all there was no mantra śāstra that was not known to him. There is an answer to this question also.

We do not know what the original hymn of Kailāsa contained after the first 41 stanzas. May be it dealt with additional matters pertaining to mantra śāstra, subtle and esoteric elements of it that are not available to this world of mortals and fit only for the divine world. So Ambā must have asked Śaṅkara to add to the mantra śāstra appropriate to this world (the first part) a section rich in poetic beauty.

Above all, it must be noted that it was only by making the Ācārya compose the second part that it could be brought home to people that he and Parameśvara are the joint authors of the work: the first part by the Śaṅkara of Kailāsa and the second part by the Śaṅkara of Kālaṭi. This would make them further realise that the two Śaṅkaras are one and the same.

Ambā must have staged the Nandikeśvara drama for the purpose of revealing to the world a single work, by combining the part composed by the Lord Parameśvara and the part composed by the incarnation of the Lord.

Another question may arise here. "Why should Nandikeśvara have been made to waylay the Ācārya [to snatch away from him the 59 stanzas]? Ambā herself could have given him the first 41 stanzas and said to him: "These are taken from a work of one hundred stanzas. The remaining stanzas are not needed by the denizens of the earth. However, since the 59 were torn away from the one hundred, compose the same number of verses to make it a śatakam[g] again and propagate the entire hymn among mankind."

Ambā could not have spoken in this manner. The reason is that, although the Ācārya was the same as the Śaṅkara of Kailāsa, in his disguise of an avatāra he was the picture of humility. Was not that the reason why he went seeking Pārvatī and Parameśvara and prostrated himself before them? After giving him one part of the work composed by Īśvara, Pārvatī would not have asked one like the Ācārya to compose the missing part. That would have meant equating him with Īśvara and it would have also meant that she failed to recognise that he was the ideal of humility in the disguise of his avatāra. However, if a "situation" was created in which the Ācārya was deprived of a part of the work (given by Parameśvara) and he suffered anguish on that account, Ambā could tell him: "Don't worry about what has happened. Make up yourself the portion you have lost." This would be the natural way of meeting the situation and there would be no suggestion of the Ācārya being shown as an equal of Īśvara. That is the explanation for the drama enacted by Nandikeśvara.

Once upon a time there was a king and he had a son who was equal to him in all respects. All the subjects knew this. The son, in keeping with his filial duty, remained obedient to his father and his conduct had the approval of all people. Suppose the queen, the mother, conscious of the fact that her son was equal to her husband in every respect, had told the prince, "You rule half the kingdom." Would that have been proper? But suppose, again, that an enemy had invaded the kingdom and occupied half of it. The queen could tell the prince: "Free that part of the kingdom which has been occupied by the enemy and keep guard over it." That would have been proper.

One's interest is awakened with a keen sense of anticipation when a subject or idea is merely hinted at or suggested without it being disclosed fully or all too directly. It was in this manner that Ambā created a situation in which the Ācārya and Īśvara were shown to share the authorship of the same hymn. Thus she hinted at the fact that the Ācārya was an incarnation of Īśvara. Nandikeśvara is as famous for his quick temper as Nārada is for creating discord. But it is all ultimately for the good [the quick temper of the one and the habit of creating conflicts of the other]. Nandikeśvara was a mere instrument in the hands of Ambā. She made him "waylay" the Ācārya and used the occasion to demonstrate to the world how he, that is the Ācārya, was true to his dharma as a sannyāsin. According to this dharma, a sannyāsin must not feel angry towards an opponent nor must he quarrel or fight with him.

After the conclusion of the Nandikeśvara drama, Ambā asked the Ācārya to complete the hymn [part of which had been snatched away by Nandikeśvara].

The result of all this is that we have come to possess a wonderful hymn that is unique in world literature. Its first part is such that it can be said of it: "As a hymnal work there is nothing to compare with it for its treatment of subtle elements of mantra śāstra." Of the second part it can be said that "there is no other hymn that is equal to it in poetic imagination". Such is the *Saundaryalaharī* with its two sections.

The poem is a remarkable combination of śāstra (that of mantra as well as that of yoga), stotra (hymn) and kavitā (poetry). If there is anything approaching it as a work combining all these three aspects we may mention the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam* (The One Thousand Names of Lalitā).

A remarkable feature of the *Saundaryalaharī* is that in the first part which mainly deals with śāstra [Śākta] there are stanzas brimming over with devotional fervour as well as those characterised by poetic beauty. It is in the first part that we have the stanza containing the words "japo jalpaḥ", representing the height of devotional ecstasy and self - surrender to the goddess; the attitude spoken of here is that everything is the doing of Ambā, that all is dependent on her grace and will. In the same part occurs another stanza with the word "Bhavānī"[1]. It is in the form of a pun and the word "Bhavānī" is used to describe the attitude of the devotee dualistically as well as non-dualistically. In the former attitude he is a "dāsa", a minion, while in the latter he is one with Ambā. There are a few more verses like these in the part dealing with mantra śāstra.

But in the latter part dealing with devotion there is hardly any Śākta element. If you search hard you may come across one or two stanzas like the one in which occur the words, "Kathaste manjastvam". Here it is mentioned that Ambā, in her form of Kāmeśvarī, is seated with Kāmeśvara on the Pañcabrahmāsana. In another stanza there is a reference to the Vedāntic concept that beyond the three states[2] is the fourth state of turīya[3]. But for a few verses like these the second part of the work is all devotional poetry. That the title of the hymn has the word "Saundarya" in it shows that its importance lies more in its poetry than in the śāstra it deals with. Although those who have commented on the work express the view that the latter part also deals with the finer aspects of the śāstra [Sākta], I somehow feel that it would be better to take it as a devotional poem. Moreover, if I were to speak out my view, whether or not I can do so... but let me express it frankly since it has occurred to me ... Could not the entire work that the Ācārya brought from Kailāsa have been seized by Nandikeśvara, and could not the Ācārya have composed all the 100 stanzas to portray the beauty of Ambā? After all there are separate treatises dealing with mantras and yantras· Why should such subjects be included in a devotional poem? I say so because the Ācārya's composition (the latter part of the *Saundaryalaharī)* is such an exalted literary work, having all the characteristics of great poetry and capable of attracting the minds of people and leading them to the path of devotion.

In fine, the true greatness of this work lies in its being a devotional poem. It seems to me that, while composing the original Kailāsa hymn, apparently as a devotee of Ambā, Parameśvara, the omniscient, must have known that on its way to the world of mortals the Ācārya would complete it as a work overflowing with poetic flavour. That is why, in the first part of his work, he included stanzas that in their bhava[g], rasa[g] and style anticipate the second part. It serves the purpose of the entire hymn bearing the stamp and style of a single composer.

I must mention one more point here. I said that the latter part of the hymn was all devotional, but the stanzas comprising this part have also māntrik potency. Each of the 100 stanzas of the *Saundaryalaharī* can be recited as a mantra and each yields its own separate fruit. This applies also to the stanzas of the second part describing the beauty of Ambā. Since it is all the "word" of the Ācārya, inspired by Ambā, and even though it does not pertain to any śāstra nor belong to the category of bījākṣaras[4], it acquires the character of a mantra. Just as all that Midas touched became gold, all the words spoken by the Ācārya are mantras. The water drawn from the well in our house has to be turned sacred by the chanting of mantras. The water from the Gaṅgā is holy on its own (naturally holy). It is so not only when it is used to bathe Viśvanātha (the deity of Kāśī), but also when we use it to bathe ourselves, to irrigate the fields or to bathe the dead. Thus, though the subject matter of the Ācārya's composition is not mantra śāstra, and though the work is better known for its poetic content, his words are imbued with the potency of mantras. While all his utterances have such power, we must in this respect make special mention of the *Saundaryalaharī* and the *Subrahmaṇya-Bhujaṅgam.*

The Ācārya filled up the missing part of a hymn that was originally wholly mantra śāstra with stanzas composed by himself. These new stanzas too have special māntrik potency. It was when he fell ill once that he composed the *Subrahmaṇya-Bhujaṅgam.* He believed that if he fell ill it was for the purpose of his composing a hymn that could be recited by all for relief from their afflictions. The *Subrahmaṇya-Bhujaṅgam* is a mantra treatise and reciting it is a remedy for all diseases. As for the *Saundaryalaharī* its recitation, apart from bringing relief from illness, benefits people in various other ways.

Notes & References

[1] These stanzas are later dealt with in detail by the Mahāsvāmī.

[2] The three states : wakefulness (jāgrata), dream (svapna) and sleep (suṣupti).

[3] "Turīya", the fourth state, is liberation. See stanza 97 of the *Saundaryalaharī.*

[4] "Seed letters" or "seed syllables".

Chapter 6

Three Great Devotional Hymns

The World Mother has been sung and worshipped in her form of Lalitāmbikā by many a great sage and by many a great poet. She has many other forms too like Durgā, Kālī, Annapūrṇeśvarī and Bhuvaneśvarī. I will now speak about Lalitāmbā alone.

Lalitā is worshipped as Rājarājeśvarī, Kāmākṣī, Kāmeśvarī and Tripurasundarī according to the Śrīvidyā tantra. The *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam*, the *Lalitā-Triśatī*, the *Lalitā-Aṣṭottaraṁ* [that is Aṣṭottara-Śatam] and so on contain the different names of Lalitā, the supreme deity of Śrīvidyā.

Among the songs in praise of Lalitā three are pre-eminent. The *Āryā-Dviśatī* by Durvāsas, the *Pañcaśatī* by Mūka, and the *Saundaryalaharī* by the Ācārya. In chronological order the *Āryā-Dviśatī* comes first, followed by the *Saundaryalaharī* and then by the *Pañcaśatī.* The *Saundaryalaharī* thus occupies, among the three, a central and commanding position.

The authors of these three works are our own (they belong to us). They are closely related to us and are specially connected with Śrī Kāmākṣī, the presiding deity of our Pīṭha. It was Durvāsas who created the manual of worship for the Kāmākṣī temple (Kāmakoṣṭha) : pūjā is performed even today according to this manual. Everyone knows the Ācārya's connection with Kāmākṣī and the Kāmakoti Pīṭha. Mūka[1] became a poet through the grace of Kāmākṣī and the hymn he has composed in 500 stanzas is in praise of her.

As I said, the *Āryā-Dviśatī* is the oldest of the three. "Dviśatī" means two hundred. The *Āryā-Dviśatī* is so called because it has 200 stanzas devoted to Devī. It is composed in the rare metre called "Āryā". Besides the subject of the hymn is also Āryā, that is Ambā.

This does not mean that Ambā is an Āryan deity, nor a Dravīḍian one. The word "Āryā" means one who is "exalted" and it does not denote any race. Giving it a racial connotation is a perversion to be attributed to the white man. Ambikā is the highest of the high. In Tamiḷ the name becomes *"Āryai"*. In old Tamil, according to the rules of that language, it is *"Aiyai"* — "Arya" = *"Aiyan"*; *"Aryaī"* = *"Aiyai"*.

Don't we address a high-ranking person belonging to any race as *"Aiyane"?* Because of their learning, conduct, character and other qualities Brahmins were regarded by others as belonging to a higher plane and came to be called "Ayyars". Even so the term denotes a jāti and not a race. All the four jātis— to be precise all the four varṇas— belong to the same race. All the hundreds of jātis have originated from these four varṇas. "Ayyar", "Ayyangār", "Mādhva" are from the same varṇa. In the same Vaiśya varṇa we have Nāṭṭukoṭṭai Ceṭṭis, Devāṅga Ceṭṭiyār, Pericettiyār, Āryavaiśyas and so on. Neither in the Gītā nor in the Dharmaśāstras, in fact in none of the texts in which Cāturvarṇya (the system of four varṇas) is mentioned, is there any reference to the first varṇa, or the first two varṇas, or the first three varṇas, as belonging to a particular race (that is the Āryan race). Also the fourth varṇa is not mentioned anywhere as belonging to a separate race (that is the Dravīḍian race).

Āryā is the name of Ambā. Our Ācārya's mother was Āryāmbā. The devotional poem of 200 stanzas by Durvāsas, apart from being in the Āryā metre, is in praise of Āryā, that is Ambā; so its name *Āryā-Dviśatī* is appropriate (denoting as it does the metre of the poem as well as the subject). It is known by another title, *Lalitā-stava-ratnaṁ*: it means a gem among the hymns adoring Lalitā.

It is customary to refer to Ambikā as "Bhaṭṭārikā" — in Tamiḷ *"Bhaṭṭarikai"*. "Bhaṭṭāraka" means one who is worthy of being worshipped : "Bhaṭṭārikā" is its feminine from. It is enough to say *"Bhaṭṭāra"* or *"Bhaṭṭāri"* (as is customary among Tamiḷs). In Tamiḷ Naḍu, in the Piḍārī temple endowments of the past mention is made of *"Bhaṭṭārikā mānyaṁ"*. So we may take it that it is "Bhaṭṭārikā" that has come to be called "Piḍārī".

Ambā is Bhaṭṭārikā. That is why three of her outstanding devotees have each the title of "Bhaṭṭāraka". One of them is Īśvara himself : he is referred to as "Paramaśiva Bhaṭṭāraka". Another is Mahākavi Kālidāsa. His literary genius and poetic muse are ascribed to the grace of Mahākālī of Ujjayinī. He is the author of the *Śyāmalādaṇḍakam* and the *Navaratnamālā*[2] which are in praise of Ambā and he is referred to as *"Śṛṅgāra Bhaṭṭāraka"*. If one Bhaṭṭāraka is a god, another is a mortal, a poet. There are two categories, "ghana" and "laghu" (weighty and light). A god is "ghana", a mortal is "laghu". There was a "Laghu Bhaṭṭāraka" who composed the *Pañca-Stavī* consisting (as the name suggests) of five hymns to Ambā. There is a view that Kālidāsa who was a "Manuṣya Bhaṭṭāraka" was also called a "Laghu Bhaṭṭāraka".

It is customary to speak of ṛṣis as belonging to a category separate from those of the celestials and mortals. Sages like Nārada were devarṣis born among the gods. There are numerous examples of ṛṣis belonging to the human race. Whatever the category or race an individual belongs to, if he grasps the timeless mantras pervading space in a subtle form and presents them to us in a form audible to us, he must be said to belong to the special category of ṛṣis. In Vedic rites there is one in which tarpaṇa (libation) is offered separately to the gods, the ṛṣis and the pitṛs (fathers belonging to the human race). Among the three Bhaṭṭārakas, since Īśvara is a god and Kālidāsa was a mortal, would it not be appropriate if the third was a ṛṣi? This third Bhaṭṭāraka was Durvāsas. Among ṛṣis he was one who received the grace of Ambā in full. He was famed for his irascibility and so was called "Krodha Bhaṭṭāraka". Thus three Bhaṭṭārakas : Paramaśiva Bhaṭṭāraka, Śṛṅgāra Bhaṭṭāraka and Krodha Bhaṭṭāraka.

Durvasas, the Krodha Bhaṭṭāraka, is the first belonging to this world to have composed hymns in praise of Ambā. Apart from the *Dviśatī,* he composed another devotional poem to the glory of Ambā entitled *Śakti-mahimā-stotram.* That Ambā manifested herself in his speech would be evident to those who read the *Dviśatī.*

In the yantra[8] called Śrīcakra there are tiers of 43 triangles, shaped like a cone, and forming a circle round a central dot or Bindu. Just as there are fortresses of five, seven and so on encircling the mūlasthāna (of a temple) there are numerous deities in the āvaraṇas or enclosures.

In his hymn Durvāsas has described in detail Kāmeśvarī in the form of Rājarājesvarī seated to the left of Kameśvara on the Bindu, adored by all the deities in the enclosures. His is an outstanding devotional work and reading it will bring divine blessings, among them particularly the gift of writing and poetry.

What is the greatest blessing Ambikā bestows on a devotee? It is the gift of speech, eloquence of a high order, that is employed in extolling her, in portraying her in various endless ways and experiencing bliss in it. And what is special about this gift? It enables a devotee to give expression to the bliss he delights in, thus making it known to others and enabling them to share in it.

Ambikā blessed a deaf devotee with the power of speech that could be said to be without bounds. We do not know his real name. He resided in the Kāmākṣī temple and we know him as Mūka, meaning one who is dumb. The moment he received the grace of the goddess he brought down a shower of not just two hundred stanzas but of five hundred in praise of Kāmākṣī. Durvāsas' work, as you know, is *Āryā-Dviśatī*. In Mūka's *Pañcaśatī*, the first one hundred stanzas are called the "Āryā-śatakaṁ" and they are in the Āryā metre. The second one hundred depict the beauty of the lotus feet of Kāmākṣī and are aptly called "Pādāravinda-śatakaṁ". The third one hundred verses extol her greatness revealed in many ways and constitute the "Stuti-śatakam". The fourth one hundred portray the goddess's sidelong glance and are called the "Kaṭākṣa-śatakaṁ". And, finally, the fifth one hundred stanzas describe her gentle smile and comprise the "Mandasmita-śatakam". Thus the five hundred stanzas in all of the *Pañcaśatī*.

The Āryā-Dviśatī and the *Mūka-Pañcaśatī* are like the work of an inspired painter. They bring before our mind's eye a portrait of Ambā. What is not accessible to the eye and the mind is brought close to us.

Note & Reference

1 Mūka, more fully Mūka-Śaṇkara, was the 20th Ācārya of the Kāñcī Śaṅkarācārya Maṭha (398 A.D — 437 A.D.)

2 The hymn beginning with the words, "Oṁkāra-pañjara-śukīm".

Chapter 7

The Saundaryalaharī — Its Grandeur

The greatness of the third work, the *Saundaryalaharī,* is obvious. One is led to say that from the time the world came into being—or from the time before it or subsequent to it—there has been no literary work to compare with it. Nor is there going to be another like it in the future. Its beauty is such, full and perfect. Read or listen to the hymn any number of times, you will never experience tedium from its beauty, nor will you find its sweetness cloying. The *Mūka-Pañcaśatī* has sweetness; the *Saundaryalaharī* too has sweetness, but added to it is its depth, its profundity. It is usually said that for "softness" [or smooth elegance] we have the *Pañcaśatī* and for depth or profundity the *Saundaryalaharī.* This does not mean that the latter work is altogether lacking in softness. However, it cannot be claimed that it employs simple words.

Amongst the Ācārya's devotional compositions the *Bhaja Govindam* is the simplest and the easiest to understand. The *Saundaryalaharī* is different : it is natural that it should have a number of somewhat difficult words since precision is called for in conveying thoughts of a subtle nature. It is only for this purpose that the Ācārya, on occasion, has had recourse to difficult words. All the same, they have their own mellifluence which you will realise when you vocalise them. Once we understand the meaning of these words we will appreciate that no other words can serve in the context and we will then applaud the poetic excellence of the language. The Ācārya composed the *Bhaja Govindam* in a simple metre, using simple words. Descriptive passages, metaphors and other figures of speech are not very much required to explain the A B C of spiritual matters, dharma and such other subjects. Here, in the *Saundaryalaharī*, when the Ācārya speaks about Ambā's beauty, the style changes and with it the metre according to the needs of the subject—and it is a subject which demands the use of his poetic genius in many different ways. He has composed this poem in the Śikhariṇī metre which has 17 syllables per foot. This metre becomes a śikhara in his hands (it takes his stanzas to the very peak of poetry) since it is particularly suited to describe the beauty of Ambā fully and eloquently.

The Ācārya has delineated Ambā's physical appearance and beauty from the 42nd stanza to the 100th. In this he has blessed us with a rain of words, with descriptive passages and with a portrayal of different aesthetic moods. The joy we derive from reading this will be no less than that of Ambā appearing before our very eyes.

When a great sculptor creates a divine image in a spirit of devotion and dedication, it would seem as if the deity so sculpted truly dwells in the image. It is in this manner that the Ācārya has composed the hymn, from an exalted plane, delighting himself again and again in the presence of Ambā, in her beauty. And, throughout, he is moved by a spirit of dedication realising as he does that his perception and understanding of her and the words that pour out from his heart in describing her are but her own gift. The result is that the hymn itself becomes an image of Ambā that is worthy of being extolled in a hymn of beauty.

How do we make a flower ornament for the hair that is gathered into a knot on the head? Flowers are strung together to make a garland. A number of such garlands are braided together and woven with gilt and *zari*. In the same manner the Ācārya is seen here as an artist, and as a poet. He creates words out of syllables, he strings together the words into the feet of a stanza, then he connects together the stanzas to form an entire poetical work of devotion. We speak of *pūmālai* and *pāmālai*[1] (garland of flowers and garland of poems). If the first delights the eye, the second enchants the ear with its beautiful words and metre. The *pūmālai* has its scent and the *pāmālai* is distinguished for its meaning. If there is nectar in the flowers, the sweetness arising out of our aesthetic appreciation of the poem is nectar to our mind. But there is this big difference between the two : the garland of flowers fades with the efflux of time but the garland of poems keeps fresh for all time.

Note

[1] "*Pūmālai*" is a Tamil word meaning a garland of flowers and *pāmalai,* also a Tamil word, means a garland of songs.

Chapter 8

A Divinely Inspired Poet — in Two Senses

There have been, and there are, many great poets. But there is a difference between poets who are ordinary human beings and other great poets with a streak of the divine in them. Śaṅkarācārya, Jñānasaṁbandhar, Nammāzhvār, Sadāśiva Brahmendra[g] possessed the poetic muse that was combined with divine inspiration. If a poet composes a poem inspired by Īśvara we call it an *arutkavi* (in Tamiḷ). It means that the poem in question is composed by the poet not out of his own imagination and experience but as a product of divine inspiration. Because of the Lord's grace, his poetry transcends his own intelligence, reasoning and experience. The poetry of great men is divinely inspired in another sense — one must say in another sense *too*. How? While such poetry gives aesthetic delight to those who read it, it also bestows on them divine grace. Generally speaking, if the term *arutkavi* means a poem inspired by divine grace, the poetry of great men inspired by divine grace is such as to impart divine grace to its readers also.

The poetry composed by great men in a state of ecstasy aroused by their perception of the divine and during moments of self- forgetfulness is *aruṭkavi* — and it is divine grace that inspires them to sing it. Saṁbandhamūrti[g] says: "My utterance is but your utterance.'' The Ācārya too, while concluding his *Saundaryalaharī,* says: "Tvadīyābhiḥ vāgbhiḥ tava janani vācām stutiriyam.'' It means: "Mother, this, your hymn, is made up of your own words." It is not only that such poems are divinely inspired, the great men who compose them are themselves dispensers of blessings. The hymns, besides being the product of divine grace, are themselves capable of conferring grace on us.

These men of grace have no compulsion to compose poetry. When they can impart their blessings directly to people, why should they have recourse to composing poetry to do the same? There is a reason for their doing so. It is only people who can see these men of grace before their eyes that can receive their blessings. Though such great men continue to bless us in their subtle form even after their departure, people like us are unfortunately not able to grasp them. Even the Paramātman we can imagine only by trying to give Him a form.

Those who actually saw the Ācārya and Jñānasaṁbandhar must have received their blessings the moment they had *darshan* of them. But such *darshan* cannot be had for ever. The world had the Ācārya's *darshan* only for 32 years. In the case of Jñānasaṁbandhar it was only for half that period. Great men like them must have been, out of their compassion, anxious that even after their passing people must have the benefit of their teachings. That is why they have gathered together all their grace, compressed and packed it so to speak, in their poems, hymns and songs that keep blessing people generation after generation; indeed eternally. It means that the blessings of Īśvara are received through the grace of these great men.

Through the *Saundaryalaharī* we receive the laharī or wave of grace of the Ācārya. Here another idea comes to mind. The Ācārya is grace incarnate, the abode of compassion. So receiving his grace is tantamount to seeing him in person. It follows that through his hymn of the *Saundaryalaharī* he not only brings us face to face with Ambā but also grants us his own *darshan*. In the end, who is she, who is he?

Who is Ambā? Who is the Ācārya?

The two are one and the same. The world obtained the *darshan* of the Ācārya for 32 years, and only for 32 years, when he dwelt in his body made up of the five elements. But he has adopted a new body called the *Saundaryalaharī* and in it he is present as sound which is but his form of grace transformed. And in this embodiment of sound that is the *Saundaryalaharī* he grants his *darshan* as long as this world lasts.

A few more words must be added about inspired poetry that conveys to us the grace of the Lord. Whatever hymn you recite with true feelings of devotion, why, even if you mumble it incoherently but with bhakti, you will receive the blessings of the Lord. But, unfortunately, such devotion is hard to come by. It is in this context that poetry that has the power to bless us comes to our help. Such hymns instil devotion in those who read them. When we recite the *Tevāram*[g] of Appar[g], that is when we repeat the words that poured out of the saint-poet's heart, the heart that had melted in devotion, they melt our hearts too and inspire bhakti in us. The *Saundaryalaharī* does not possess this quality to the same degree. All the same it attracts us with its aesthetic and poetic content and draws us towards Ambā, filling us with feelings of devotion.

There is *arutkavi* of another kind. I speak of "kavi" here in the sense of "kavitā" (poetry). In Sanskrit "kavi" means "poet" and his work (his composition) is "kāvya" or "kavitā". In Tamiḷ both the poet and his poem are called "kavi", as if the person who composes a poem himself takes its form. I was going to speak about one kind of *arutkavi.* In this kind it is immaterial whether or not we have the requisite devotion. Let it be whatever... The devotional poetry I have in mind does not bestow grace on us because we are devout, nor does it inspire devotion in us, and reward us with blessings. But it brings us divine grace if we recite it because of the special quality of its sound.

The sound of such poems has divine power which manifests itself irrespective of whether or not we who read them are devout. Not only do we need to be particularly devout, the poem in question also need not be specially meaningful, nor capable of evoking aesthetic pleasure or be moving otherwise. However, on account of the special nature of the sound of its words, it will be capable of capturing divine grace and making it available to us. This is what is called mantraśakti, the potency of mantras. Words that are imbued with māntrik energy, if chanted repeatedly (if we keep muttering them, perform what is called japa), even without being aware of their meaning and without any emotional involvement, the divine power of their sounds will bring us manifold blessings. Many a great man has sung many a hymn. All their devotional works are noted for the meaning they convey, their poetic flavour, emotional content and so on. Combined with these qualities is the māntrik character of their sounds. We also note that there are two kinds of hymns: some are of a high order because of the ideas and meaning they convey; and some are notable for the blessings they bring us characterised as they are by māntrik power.

None of the compositions of the Ācārya can be said to be lacking in meaningfulness. Each is a mine of gems, not ordinary gems or gems of the "imitation" variety. There are two hymns of the Ācārya that learned men have chosen for their māntrik power, the māntrik power with which each stanza is instinct. As I have already mentioned, one of the two is the

Subrahmaṇya-Bhujaṅgaṁ, the other is the *Saundaryalaharī*. It is not the first 41 stanzas alone of the latter work—they deal with mantra śāstra — that have māntrik power. All the 100 stanzas have such power. The latter part of the composition comprising the stanzas that describe Ambā's beauty can fetch the power of the divine because of the exalted nature of the sound of the verses and their high māntrik strength. Each of these stanzas will bring its own special benefit if recited repeatedly, that is in the manner of performing japa. Generation after generation, countless numbers of people have followed this practice and been rewarded. One has to be initiated into this practice by a guru, in private, and one must understand the import conveyed by the verses.

As a devotional composition, or as a poem, anyone will find reading the *Saundaryalaharī* rewarding. But if it is regarded as a mantra śāstra, from which benefits are to be derived, one must be guided by a guru and one must observe a certain discipline.

There is another way of regarding the hymn.

All we have to do is to read the hymn, keeping in mind the one benefit of unflinching devotion to the goddess. All other benefits are encompassed by it and will naturally flow from it. You will not mind even if these other benefits do not come to you, or are not granted by Ambā. If you are truly devoted you will not expect any reward.

The hymns composed by the Ācārya to Śiva, Viṣṇu, Ambā and other deities are divinely inspired in two senses : I have explained this earlier. Apart from the "Ānandalaharī", which forms the first part of the *Saundaryalaharī*, he has composed a separate work called the *Ānandalaharī*. Then we have his long hymns to Ambā like the *Devi-Bhujaṅgam*, the *Tripurasundarī-mānasapūjā-stotraṁ*, the *Tripurasundarī-Catusṣaṣṭyupacāra-pūjā-stotraṁ*, the *Tripurasundarī-Veda-pāda-stavam*. Then there are shorter hymns like the *Annapūrṇāṣṭakaṁ*, the *Ambāṣṭakaṁ* and the *Bhavānī-Bhujaṅgaṁ*. The Ācārya has also composed hymns to the deities of temples like Madurai Mīnākṣī, Śṛṅgerī Śāradāmbā, Śrīśailam Bhramarāmbā. Like his *Śivāparādha-kṣamāpaṇa-stotraṁ* is his *Kālī-stutī* which is a prayer to Ambā to forgive us our sins. It (*Kālī-stuti*) is also called *Kālyaparādhabhañjana-stotraṁ*. Knowledgeable people read this work religiously believing that it was written by the Ācārya when he was in Beṅgāḷ which is famous for Śakti worship.

Though the Ācārya has composed scores of devotional poems on various deities, his *Saundaryalaharī* is celebrated the world over as occupying the "top" position. In the *Aṣṭottara* nāmāvali [Aṣṭottara-śatam, string of 108 names] to the Ācārya himself, there is a reference to this fact: "Saundaryalaharī-mukhya-bahustotra-vidhāyakāya-namaḥ" : "obeisance to the one who has created many hymns, chief among them being the *Saundaryalaharī*".

There is no reference to any other hymn of his (in the *Aṣṭottara* nāmāvali). Just as among his commentaries on works already existing [source books of Vedānta] his expository treatise on the *Brahmasūtra* occupies the pre-eminent position, and among his original Vedāntic works (prakaraṇa granthas) the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (The Crest Jewel of Discrimination) is the crest jewel, so among his devotional compositions the *Saundaryalaharī* occupies the highest place.

To people reading the *Saundaryalaharī* any number of hidden or inner meanings will reveal themselves according to their perception, maturity, learning, nature and standing in life. So many meanings [of the passages of the *Saundaryalaharī*] have suggested themselves to different devotees. This will be the case in the future also. We cannot say that "it is all over with this"; new shades of meaning will keep emerging: it is like the water in a spring welling up as you keep digging the earth. I am here speaking to you about the meanings that occur to me and it does not mean that there is nothing more to be said. Those who keep digging deeper and deeper and keep diving deeper and deeper will come up with new gems. If, out of the compassion of Ambā, one or more from among you present new meanings to me it will be a great *ratnābhiṣeka* or *muktābhiṣeka*[1] for me.

Note

[1] Great ones like the Mahāsvāmī are usually honoured with a "kanakābhiṣeka", shower of gold coins or small flowers made of gold. Here he suggests that he will feel more honoured by the discovery of new meanings of the hymn than by being sprinkled with (or bathed with) gems and pearls.

Chapter 9

Commentaries on the Hymn

There are poetical works that appeal to our literary sensibilities and they are interpreted according to our degree of maturity. Then there are verses that deal with mantra śāstra in an aphoristic manner and they are commented upon elaborately. The *Saundaryalaharī* is remarkable for its poetic beauty; at the same time it deals with subtle māntrik concepts. So it has come to have a large number of commentaries. It is learnt that there are 34 commentaries of the poem in Sanskrit, but all of them may not be available now[1]. Of them the one by Lakṣmīdhara is particularly renowned. It is from Bhāskararāya's commentary on the *Lalitā-Śahasranāmaṁ* that we have come to know many details with regard to Lalitopāsanā (the worship of Lalitā), also called Śrīvidyā tantra. Like Bhāskararāya for the *Sahasranāmam* is Lakṣmīdhara for the *Saundaryalaharī*. Also famous to an extent are the commentaries by two distinguished scholars[2] : "Saubhāgyavardhinī" and "Aruṇāmodinī". Recently we obtained the Ānandagiri commentary from the Ṃanuscripts Library of Nepāḷ. Ānandagiri, who was proficient in mantra śāstra, mentions that he wrote his commentary at the instance of the Śaṅkarācārya[3] of a maṭha of his time. Among the immediate disciples of Ādi Śaṅkara there was an Ānandagiri. It is believed that he was the same as Toṭakācārya. There is also an Ānandagiri who wrote ṭikas or glosses for some of the Ācārya's bhāṣyas or commentaries. There was an Ānandagiri among those who wrote the life of the Ācārya— that is one of the "Śaṅkaravijayas". We have now learned that among the ancient commentators of the *Saundaryalaharī* too there was one with the same name.

Of the many commentaries of the *Saundaryalaharī* there is one called "Gopālasundarī". A noteworthy features of it: the commentator claims that the work also sings the praises of Viṣṇu. So his interpretation is from the standpoint of the worship of Ambā as well as of Viṣṇu. Just as there is a special mantra that brings Lalitāmbā and Kṛṣṇa together as Gopālasundarī, there is a Vaiṣṇava exposition of our hymn to Ambā.

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī who was a great exponent of Advaita has similarly written a commentary on the *Śiva-mahimna-stotra* from the Vaiṣṇava angle.

The fame of the *Saundaryalaharī* could be gauged from the fact that palm-leaf manuscripts of the hymn and commentaries are to be found in every part of India and in libraries such as the Sarasvatī Mahal in Tañjāvūr, the Bhaṇḍārkar Oriental Institute, Pune, and the Baroda Library. People in Kāśmīr believe that the Ācārya composed the hymn in their land and they are proud of the fact.

Apart from being inscribed on palm-leaves, this work is also engraved on stone. The sanctum of Sugandhakuntālambā in the Mātṛbhūteśvara temple on the Rock Fort at Tirucirāpalli is particularly sacred. The goddess is called "Maṭṭuvār Kuzhali" in Tamiḷ. "Tāyumānavar" *(Tāyum Ānavar)* is the beautiful Tamiḷ equivalent of "Mātṛbhūteśvara". The Mother Goddess in the temple here is Maṭṭuvār Kuzhali. The sanctum itself is shaped like a Śrīcakra. In nearby Jambukeśvaram (Tiruvānaikā) it was the Ācārya who fixed the Śrīcakra tāṭaṅkas (ear-ornaments) on the ears of Akhilāṇḍeśvarī. The 41 stanzas, comprising the first part of the *Saundaryalaharī,* were inscribed on stone here long, long ago; and, it is said, at the instance of the Ācārya himself. In the *Saundaryalaharī,* at the very beginning of his portrayal of Ambā from her tresses of hair to her sacred feet (keśādi-pādāntaṁ), he extols the tresses of hair in the words, "cikura-nikurumbam...saurabhyam sahaja" (Stanza 43). It means hair that is naturally sweet-scented. (Kuntala is the *kuzhal* in *kuzhali.*) The Ācārya's connection with the sanctum of Sugandhakuntalāmbā is appropriate.

It is believed that the *Saundaryalaharī* is inscribed on the walls of the edifice of Pārvātī and Paramaeśvara on Kailāsa and that it was the work of Gaṇapati who had inscribed the Mahābhārata on the slopes of the Meru mountain. There is also a story that the Gandharva Puṣpadanta, author of the *Śiva-mahimna-stotra,* engraved the hymn on the walls around Kailāsa.

The fact that there are many such stories about the hymn speaks for its greatness.

I will mention a fact that is likely to astound people who think that all such accounts [as given above] are fictitious. The present story takes the *Saundaryalaharī* far beyond Kailāsa to America. You know that there is a place called Philadelphia City in Pennsylvania state in that country. In the Philadelphia Museum of Art there are many palm-leaf manuscripts and among them there is one of the *Saundaryalaharī*. What is interesting about it is that it carries a portrait of Ambā along with each stanza to illustrate the idea or meaning it conveys. Each leaf has three stanzas and three pictures. In all there are 36 leaves or so. There are a number of indologists in America and the palm-leaf manuscript of our hymn was bought as an art treasure at a very high price. The professor of Sanskrit in Pennsylvania University sent one leaf of the manuscript with its three stanzas to Rāghavan[4] of Maḍrās University with a request to explain how the pictures served to interpret the meaning of the verses. I myself saw the palm-leaf with the three pictures when I visited the (Maḍrās) University. On that leaf there was a picture by the side of each stanza. One of the verses — there is no description of Ambā's physical form in it — speaks of the goddess thus: "You are the mind, you are space, you are wind...." (Stanza 35). Even this is illustrated symbolically.

Another copy of this palm-leaf manuscript is in the Baroḍa Library. Somehow one copy went across to America.

The *Saundaryalaharī* has always enjoyed fame in Tamiḷ Nāḍu. Many years ago Virai Kavirājā Paṇḍita did a Tamiḷ translation in verse. Now the hymn is very much in fashion. Women form into groups and sing the verses, rendering them in various rāgas (rāgamālikā). Such groups are to be met in village after village, town after town.

Above everything else [speaking of the hymn] there is something specially important to us. Of the many forms of Ambā, the beautiful Rājarājeśvarī of the *Saundaryalaharī* dwells in the temple of our Maṭha, Kāñcī Kāmakoṣṭha. The Kāmākṣī who is here is indeed Rājarājeśvarī. The temple has many connections with the Ācārya. It was here that he re-established the Kāmakoṭi Pīṭha that had declined in between, and consecrated the Śrīcakra as a forceful living entity. At the same place he ascended the Sarvajña Pīṭha (seat of omniscience). Here it was that he attained videhamukti (liberated, shedding his mortal coils). There is a life-size idol of the Ācārya in the Kāmākṣī temple. The Ācārya has a great connection with the Kāñcī Kāmākṣī temple. His jayantī[5] is observed for ten days starting from Vaiśākha Śukla Pañcamī[6] (the day of his avatāra). Every day, during these ten days, his processional image is taken out and installed outside the Gāyatrī maṇḍapa on a seat facing Ambā. Every day 10 stanzas from the *Saundaryalaharī* are recited (thus 100 stanzas in 10 days). On the tenth day the processional image of the Ācārya and the processional deity of Ambā are kept in the Śukravāra maṇḍapa in the outer ambulatory : the last ten stanzas of the hymn are recited here. It is customary to honour the Ācārya's mūrti (the image) with *parivaṭṭam* (cloth tied round the head). It seems such honour as *parivaṭṭam* and paṭṭabhiṣekam (coronation) are bestowed on the Ācārya's mūrti chiefly because he is the author of the *Saundaryalaharī*.

Why is the hymn considered so great? What is the reason for its being so popular? The chief reason is that it brings before us the Paramātman in the form of Mother.

Notes & References

[1] The *Saundaryalaharī* was published by Śrī A. Kuppuswāmī (in 1978) with nine commentaries in the original Sanskrit, and with short notes in English and Tamiḷ. And in 1986 the same editor (Śrī A.K.) brought out a second edition with 10 commentaries. Both editions were published under the direction of His Holiness the 68th Ācārya of the Kāñcī Śaṅkara Maṭha (Mahāsvāmī).

[2] Kaivalyāśrama and Kāmeśvara Sūri

[3] From the commentary of Ānandagiri we come to know that the name of the Śaṅkarācārya was Ānandavāra Kṛtsna Śankarācārya. So far (1992) we have no knowledge of the period in which he lived and of the maṭha of which he was the head.

[4] The late Dr V. Rāghavan, well-known indologist.

There are apparently two illustrated manuscripts of the *Saundaryalaharī*. W. Norman Brown, Professor of Sanskrit, University of Pennsylvania, is the author of the book, *The Saundaryalaharī or Flood of Beauty*, published by Harvard University Press in 1958. He writes: "The two illustrated manuscripts of the *Saundaryalaharī* [he calls them B1, B2] contain a miniature painting for each stanza of the text. B1 is clearly the earlier, and either its illustrations or some very nearly identical series of illustrations were copied by the artists of B2; compositions and treatment are almost identical in the two, though B2 in several cases carelessly departs from B1 with a loss of exactitude or appropriateness of detail. The two manuscripts have the same size and format of page, with dimensions of 8½ in. in length and about 4 in. in depth. Many of the paintings of B1 are in a very late form of the Early West Indian style, the rest in a kind of "Rājput" or Rājasthāni style. The paintings of B2 are all in a Rājput style. In the use of colours B1 has the more limited palette, employing the narrow range of the Early Western Indian style — two reds, blue, green, yellow, black, white. B2 has a wider range, using more of the shades appearing in Rājput painting. The colours of B1 are darker in tone than those of B2 and have been rubbed more and reproduce less clearly..."

Norman Brown believes that B1 was "manufactured" in the last quarter of the 16th century or the first quarter of the 17th century; and B2 during the first half of the 17th century, "not long after the presumptive time of B1...."

5 The birthday or birth anniversary of divine incarnations, sages, ācāryas is known as "jayanti".

6 The fifth day of the waxing moon of the month of Vaiśākha (May-June).

Chapter 10

Mother Worship

Auvvai[8] says that mother and father are the first gods we come to recognize. The Vedas exhort us to think of mother as well as father as God. Both (Auvvai and the Vedas) place mother first, before father.

"Look upon mother as God." If we reverse the order of the words in the sentence, it will read, "Look upon God as mother." It is when we think of our mother as God that we think of Ambā and worship her. There is greater joy in regarding the Paramātman as Mother than in thinking of him in any other form. Why? There is no one more loving than a mother. We feel free before our mother and do not fear her in the least. Nor are we shy in her presence. When we are with her there is no cause for fear or shyness. When fear grips a child it cries "Mother" and goes and hugs her. When we are with our mother we do not have any sense of shame about all those thoughts and emotions that come with age and trouble our mind: indeed these are erased in her presence.

A mother's love is unique; it is unalloyed and absolute. The mother loves her son with all her heart, no matter how he behaves, and she does not mind whether or not he has affection for her. We say, "The mother's heart is like that of one mad with affection, the son's heart is stone." The *Devī-aparādha-kṣamāpaṇa-stotram* has this[1]: "A wicked son there may be, but a wicked mother never." We cling to our mother from the very moment of our birth. We are formed of her life, of her body, of the food she eats. From feeding us to everything else we are dependent on her from birth. It is in our childhood that our mother's love is the most intense. It is then that our love for her is also the most intense. We are then totally dependent on her. It is now, when our mind is not disturbed by desire and carnal love, that she becomes our only refuge. It is in childhood that we surrender to her in the firm belief that "she is there to look after us, that she will do everything for us". To have utter faith, to have the attitude of surrender, to have a mind that is free from thoughts of desire and carnal love — it is in fact because of the godly nature inherent in being childlike that we think of the Paramātman as

Mother. Whether it is hungry, whether it longs for some plaything or other, whether it is suffering from some pain, whatever it is, the child clings to that one entity, the mother. Similarly, to hold on to the Paramātman securely one must make oneself a child and look upon him as the World Mother. The Upaniṣads exhort us to make ourselves a child, to become a child.[2]

To look upon the Paramātman as the Universal Mother does not mean that we try to be happy thinking of an imaginary or non-existent entity. As a matter of fact the Paramātman who is the source of all qualities has in him motherhood also. Is not the Paramātman the root of all mothers of the world, all their filial affection, all their spirit of sacrifice? So, even if we do not imagine him to be one, the Paramātman has motherhood overflowing in him. It is this that Māṇikkavācakar[g] refers to when he speaks of "the One that is the supreme mother compassionate". He also says: "Father indeed is mother, the incomparable gem." Apparsvāmigal[g] exclaims, addressing the Lord: "You are father, you are mother." It is by perceiving the motherly character of the Paramātman that these saint-poets have spoken thus.

However loving our mother is, the mother who has given us birth, our connection with her is not everlasting, since it will be severed when she dies or when we die. In different births we are born to different mothers. But the root or source of the love of all these mothers, the Paramātman, is eternal. That is why the words, "the continuing motherhood"[3]· The Paramātman is not merely the mother of the body that perishes but the mother compassionate of the imperishable life (or Self), protecting us here and hereafter. This Paramātman is not the mother of just five or ten children, but the mother of all creatures including worms and other insects, elephants and lions, human beings and celestials. It is this Great Mother that creates not only the food needed by each and every being but also other objects needed for their enjoyment. For the baby there is milk in the mother's breast and when it is in the womb it is fed through the umbilical cord connecting the two. Is such an arrangement made by each mother individually? No, there is a Great Mother, Parāśakti, whose work it is.

The Paramātman nourishes not only our body but also our life and is the mother who fosters our knowledge and makes us aware of the Ātman. As mother he gives us milk to sustain our body, but what is more he gives us the milk of jñāna (enlightenment) that dissolves all distinctions such as mother and son and indeed makes the two one [with the milk of jñāna we become one with the Paramātman].

Extending the logic that we must adore our mother in our present birth as God; we must worship the Paramātman as Mother since he is the cause of all our births and at the same time the cause of the cessation of our births.

We may think of the Paramātman in any form we like and he will bestow his grace on us taking that form. If we pray to the Parabrahman that he must become our mother, become Ambikā, he will do so and bless us in answer to our prayer.

If you ask why the formless should have a form, it is because all of us have originated from that root and that root is our mother and we are its children. Leave aside the fact that we too are formless, that we too are the Ātman; that is something of which we have no awareness yet. All that our mind can grasp now is that the multifarious forms of life, animals, birds and so on, must have a root. Also note how all those belonging to the same species are similar. This root is mother and all those who have sprung from this root are her children.

The child wants to see its mother; it wants her to be by its side. What is the point if she leaves its food in any place she likes and disappears? The child will not touch that food; she must present herself before the child and feed it herself. More than the food what it wants is its mother. It is happy if it can see her, if she is by its side. It is not enough if she keeps calling from somewhere inside the house, "My darling child, my prince!" The child must see her. The mother must lift it up and carry it in her arms. When it looks at her face it smiles happily. We too are children, aren't we? Yes, of Parāśakti. We too feel that it is not enough to know that a formless Parāśakti, Parāśakti that is a concept, is protecting us. Parāśakti must come before us lovingly to protect us and she must come in a form that we can see. Only then will we find happiness and fulfilment.

If we wish to perceive the Paramātman as the embodiment of compassion that is supreme, then there is no form other than that of Ambā to represent it. For the child its mother, for the calf the cow.

Likewise for all creatures, throughout all their births, at any time, Paradevatā (Parāśakti) is the mother. If we love her lotus feet with all our heart there will be fullness in our life. If we worship her as Mother such love will naturally begin to flow as a flood from our hearts. When we meditate on Ambā ceaselessly, such meditation itself will become the sacred water to relieve us of our pain and to wipe away all our sins. This it is that is the spring of all love.

We often say, "Brothers and sisters" : these words used in a public lecture or in writing come only from our lips. For such words to be sincerely felt we must realize inwardly that all of us have in truth the Paramātman as the One Mother, which sentiment is reflected in the words of Kālidāsa, "Namaste jagadekamātaḥ" (Obeisance to you, the One Mother of the World)[4]. The love that inspires us to embrace all creatures as our brethren will spring in our hearts when we become aware that there is but one mother common to all of them and to us.

Notes & References

[1] "Kuputro jāyeta kvacidapi kumāta na bhavati."

[2] The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniśad*, 3.5.1.

[3] "*Todarndu ninren tāyārai*" (You have become my mother by being near me continually.) — Apparsvāmigal's *Tiruttāṇḍakam*.

[4] From the *Śyāmalādaṇḍakam*.

Chapter 11

Devī in Sacred Literature

For the reasons mentioned above, the Paramātman, in his feminine form of Mother, has been worshipped from Vedic times. Vedic hymns like the "Śrīsūktam", the "Durgāsūktam", the "Rātrisūktam" and the "Devīsūktam" and the praises addressed to Uṣas (goddess of dawn), Aditī and so on are part of the tradition of Devī worship. Of the 108 Upaniṣads there are three centred on Ambā. In the Mahābhārata we see that Arjuna worships Durgā, and in the *Bhāgavatam* we note that the gopīs and Rukmiṇī adore Ambā to win a good husband. Great seers like Hayagrīva, Agastya and Durvāsas have sung the praises of the goddess. Poets like Kālidāsa too have composed numerous hymns to her.

The Tamiḷ *Tevāraṁ, Tiruvācakaṁ, Tirumurai and Divyaprabandhaṁ*[g], as they extol Śiva or Viṣṇu as the case may be, do so along with singing the praises of Ambā or Lakṣmī (Ambā together with Śiva and Lakṣmī together with Viṣṇu.) In the (Tamil literary) division called *Aindinai*[1] we learn that Ambā has been worshipped from time immemorial in Tamiḷ Nāḍu as Koṟṟavai, the presiding deity of *Pālai* or arid country. In the Jaina poetical work called *Śilappadikāram*[g] there is a long and beautiful panegyric to Koṟṟavai that is Durga and it captivates our minds. In the temples of Tamiḷ Nāḍu, the sanctum of Amman (Ambā) and Śukravārasevā[2] are specially important. In the *Tirumantiram* of Tirumūlar[g] much is said about the glory of Śakti. Tāyumānavar[g] has sung the praises of Parvatavardhinī (Akhilāṇḍeśvarī and Bṛhannāyakī). Rāmaliṅgasvāmigaḷ[g] has composed a devotional poem on Tiruvoṟṟiyūr Tripurasundarī. Today *Abhirāmī Antādī*[g] is a renowned work. Bhāratī[g] has also composed poems extolling Śakti. I have heard that there is an ancient Tamil hymn to Vārāhī, a goddess not much worshipped in later times.

The chief reason why the *Saundaryalaharī* has a pre-eminent place (among devotional hymns) is that it is a poem on Mother who is so dear to us and who is so intimately connected with us. Also the one who has composed it, the Ācārya, is not only the recipient of the blessings of

Ambā, he is indeed an aspect of hers. That the great Ācārya who is an exponent of Advaita, which speaks of a Reality that has neither a name nor a form, is the author of the work makes it glorious beyond words.

References

[1] It is a part of Tamiḷ literature.

[2] Devotions to the goddess on Fridays.

Chapter 12

The Two "Laharīs" and Their Names

Why the name "Saundaryalaharī"? "Saundaryam" means "beauty". What is "sundaram" is "saundaryam". "Laharī" means a flow, a wave; it is also understood as a "big wave" or as a "billow". The meaning proper here (in the title of the hymn) is "a flow that comes in wave after wave", "beauty that comes cascading and in a flood".

The source of all beauty in the world is the Paramātman. This hymn is called "Saundaryalaharī" because it portrays the beauty of the Paramātma-Śakti in the form of Mother, describing her from head to foot.

A work consisting of a hundred stanzas is usually called a "śatakam". There is a hymn to Sūrya (the Sun God) called *Mayūraśatakam.* I have already told you about Mūka's *Pañcaśatī* consisting of five parts, each called a śatakam. The entire composition comprising the five śatakams is *Pañcaśatī.* I also told you about *Dviśatī* by Durvāsas which has two śatakams. In Tamiḷ too there are works like *Toṇḍaimaṇḍala-śatakam* and *Kumareśa-śatakam.*

Neither of the Ācārya's devotional works, each consisting of a hundred stanzas, the one addressed to Śiva and the other to Ambā, is called a "śatakam". Both have "laharī" in their titles. We do not know whether the Ācārya himself gave these titles to his works or whether others gave them — or did the titles "happen" on their own? Of the two hymns, the one in praise of Īśvara is the *Śivānandalaharī* and the second, devoted to Ambā, is the *Saundaryalaharī.*

The two compositions have come from the Ācārya as a river in flood breaking over its embankments and originating from the heights of devotional fervour. They are not the outcome of deliberation but the spontaneous outpouring of his inner experience that is like water welling up in a spring and flowing in waves. That is how the word "laharī" used in the title must be considered apt.

Since the hymns take the form of a flood that comes in waves we too float in them. If they were known as "śatakams" it would mean that with the hundredth stanza we would reach the shore [that is our poetic and devotional journey would come to an end with the hundredth śloka]. But the word "laharī" in the titles suggests that without reaching the shore we could continue to keep floating in the hymns, or to keep swimming or boating in them for as long as we like. In other words, we do not stop abruptly with the hundredth stanza with which the Ācārya concludes either work. The divine joy we derive from reading the hymns we will continue to experience in a heightened manner as we picture to ourselves the beauty streaming in a flood from Ambā and the sport of Īśvara manifested in waves. Without setting a limit to the devotee's imagination—which would have been the case had the hymns been called "śatakams"—the Ācārya seems to suggest through the word "laharī" in the titles: "Let your thoughts that keep revolving round and round the divine Father and Mother be such as can become a continuous flow, thoughts occurring to you according to your different perceptions of the hymns."

The Ācārya is as humble, and as modest, as he is intellectually eminent and spiritually great. So he does not claim that he has risen to the heights of devotional fervour and that his hymns flowed from them as a stream (that is "laharī"). However, the titles *Śivānandalaharī* and *Saundaryalaharī* occur in the text of the two respective hymns. This is particularly noteworthy. Such does not seem to be the case with the Ācārya's other works. You may ask, "Take the example of *Bhaja Govindam*. Is not this title taken from the very first words of the hymn?" The answer is it is not so. The title of what we call *Bhaja Govindam* is actually *Moha-Mudgaram*. "Mudgaram" means a (horse) whip. That which splits one's moha (delusion) is "moha-mudgaram". But the hymn is sung as a musical composition with a pallavi[1] and a number of caraṇas[2]. At the end of each stanza there is a refrain, "Bhaja Govindam, bhaja Govindam, bhaja Govindam mūḍha-mate." People came to identify the hymn with "Bhaja Govindam" and the two words came to be used as its title. It is only in the two "laharī hymns" that the words occurring in their respective texts — "Ānandalaharī" and "Saundaryalaharī" — became their titles.

Let us see where the Ācārya uses these terms (the titles of the two hymns.) First *Śivānandalaharī*. The very first of the 100 stanzas of the *Saundaryalaharī* starts with these words, "Śivaḥ Śaktyā yukto", that is it starts with the name of Śiva. Later in the text also it is mentioned that Ambā takes great delight in listening to the praises of Śiva sung by Sarasvatī (Stanza 66). So it would please Ambā if we examined *Śivānandalaharī* first.

"Śivānandalaharī" means the joy that comes as a flood as we become aware of Śiva or "Śivam". In other words it is knowing inwardly all the countless auspicious qualities of Śiva, his glory, his grace, his might, and how he sports in his various forms — the burning of Kāma, the destruction of Kāla and of Tripura, his wandering as a mendicant in the Dāruka forest, his marriage to Pārvatī, Kailāsa darśana, his dance as Naṭarāja, his taking the form of a hunter, how Brahmā and Viṣṇu went in search of his head and feet respectively.

The same Śiva when internalised without a form is known as "Śivam". According to the *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad*, when a seeker transcends the states of wakefulness, dream and sleep and comes to the state in which he realizes that the Ātman is One and only one—that is when he arrives at the fourth state called "turīya", with the realization that the universe itself is absorbed in this state and experiences Śivam, that is the one and only Reality -- he himself becomes Śivam. Thus the hymn brings us twofold bliss in speaking about the two types of Śiva: the "līlānanda" with regard to Śiva and the "Ātmānanda" with regard to Śivam. "Śivānandalaharī" is the proper name for it since the two types of bliss rise as a cascade from it.

Let us see in what context the Ācārya uses the term "Śivānandalaharī". In the very first stanza he pays obeisance to Pārvatī and Parameśvara. Such is the tradition — to speak of Śiva together with Ambā as "Sāmbamūrti" or "Sāmbaśiva" (sa + Ambā = Sāmba, meaning "together with Ambā"). The Ācārya first refers to Śiva and Śakti as a pair. In the next stanza he uses the term "Śivānandalaharī", concluding the verse thus: "Vasantī macceto hṛdabhuvi Śivānandalaharī".

What does the Ācārya say here? He refers to the river of bliss that devotion to Parameśvara is, mentions where it rises, what it does during its course and where it has its confluence, that is where it ends its journey. This stream of bliss has its source in the story that tells all about Śiva's divine sport. A river sweeps away all dirt as it courses along.

Similarly, this river of bliss originating from devotion to Śiva wipes away the impurities caused by our sins. Apart from being a purifier, does not a river bring relief from heat, provide cool water for people to drink, to bathe and irrigate their crops? In the same way, the Śivānanda river, apart from doing away with our sins, destroys our pain — not of the throat or stomach but of our worldly existence. Then it divides itself into distributaries and forms into a delta consisting of all those branches of external knowledge perceived by the intelligence and empties itself into the lake that is the Lord's will or consciousness.

A river has to empty itself, find its destination, somewhere. Most rivers empty themselves in the ocean but some find their destination in lakes. Small streams and canals find their way even into a *puzhaleri*[3]. After it falls into the sea a river cannot be harnessed for irrigation nor can its water be drawn for drinking. But rivers that fall into lakes are always useful. The flood of Śivānanda that has taken the form of ślokas composed by the Ācārya, is it not useful to the world for all time? If he were to answer expressly, "It is so", it would be mistaken for arrogance. So he says in a veiled manner, "The Śivānanda river has collected itself in the lake of my consciousness." "Mat-ceto-hṛḍa" means the "lake of my consciousness". The river of līlānanda arising from the story of Śiva empties itself into the consciousness of the devotee and, collecting itself there, becomes tranquil spiritual bliss.

The term "Saundaryalaharī" occurs in the third of the stanzas describing Ambā's beautiful form, from her head of hair to her feet—it is the 44th stanza of the hymn taken as a whole. The Śrīcakra consists of 43 triangles. There is a view that the Bindu at the centre is also a triangle, thus making the total number of triangles in the Śrīcakra 44. The *Saundaryalaharī* itself mentions 44 triangles when it says "catuścatvāriṁśad-vasudala-kalāśra (third line, 11th stanza). The Śrīcakra is not only the home, the residence, of Ambā: it is indeed her form as a diagram (yantra-svarūpaṁ). With the 41st stanza the Ācārya concludes the portion dealing with yantra, mantra and tantra. Even though he depicts Ambā's physical form in a manner that all people can take delight in without difficulty, he gives us a hint of his interest in, and devotion to, śāstra also by describing her yantra form in the 44th stanza in which he uses the term "Saundaryalaharī" to indicate the flood of beauty that Ambā's physical form is.

To one of his śatakams the Ācārya gives the name of "Śivānandalaharī" which yields the meaning, "the stream of joy associated with Śiva". The name "Śiva" is expressly mentioned here. But in the second śatakam no such prefix has been used to denote that the hymn is about Ambā. The title is merely "Saundaryalaharī" which means a flood of beauty. *Ambāṣṭakam, Ambā-pañcaratnam, Devī-bhujaṅgam, Devī-catusṣaṣti-upacāra-pūjā-stotraṁ* are some of the Ācārya's other hymns. The title of this śatakam on the goddess is not similar; it is not "Ambā-Saundaryalaharī" or "Devī-Saundaryalaharī".

The fact is saundaryam itself means Ambā. Is that not so? Is it not enough to say "pānakam" to denote a sweet drink? Is it necessary to say "*vella*-pānakam[4]?" When we squeeze limes, oranges and apples we get lime-juice, orange-juice and apple-juice. But we also add to them jaggery or another form of it, sugar. When we refer to the beauty of other gods or goddesses we have to specifically mention their names (that is the name of the god or goddess concerned must be used as a prefix before the word meaning beauty). But the source of their beauty is Ambā; the material or "commodity" out of which their beauty has been made is Ambā — Ambā is the root of all beauty.

That which makes all beautiful things beautiful, all beautiful objects beautiful, that which is the be-all and end-all of everything that is beautiful is the beauty of Ambā. The beauty of Ambā alone is true beauty. So, while speaking of Ambā's beauty, we do not have to specifically use the word "Ambā's" before "beauty". [The word "beauty" itself means Ambā.]

Notes

[1] The opening part of a Carṇātic musical composition. It also serves as the refrain.

[2] The concluding part of a Carṇātic composition, following the "anupallavi". (Thus a Carṇātic composition consists of the pallavi, the anupallavi and the caraṇam.)

[3] Puzhaleri , name of a lake that supplies drinking water to the city of Chennai.

[4] *Vella-pānakam* : a tautological expression, "sweet drink made of jaggery".

Chapter 13

A Title with Universal Appeal

Another point occurs to me. If we were to include "Ambā" in the title, it would mean that the work is of interest to followers of our religion alone. People belonging to other faiths, as well as atheists, would have no interest in it. If the title were merely "Beauty" — "Flood of Beauty", "Saundaryalaharī" — it would arouse universal interest, that is even people belonging to other religions, atheists, and so on would be interested in it. Beauty has a universal appeal. The natural beauty of Kāśmīr enchants the American as much as it does the Englishman. Affluent people from our country go to enjoy the scenic beauty of Switzerland. It is not only nature that attracts. People without any difference flock to see man-made objects of beauty like sculptures. Even more than noble qualities like love and sacrifice, it is outward beauty that attracts all people. Those who are opposed to one another, who are at loggerheads with one another, come together when it is a question of appreciating beauty.

A book with the word "Beauty" in the title will attract all people, irrespective of their religion or caste and irrespective of whether they are devotees of God or are atheists. Once they start reading it they will become engrossed in it as they find in it a feminine being of surpassing beauty depicted by a gifted poet. Like a sugar-coated pill, if a book has hidden in it the medicine to nurture the Ātman (Self) -- though outwardly or superficially it describes beauty — those who read it for its passages on beauty will, without realising it themselves, become involved in [higher matters like] devotion to Ambā. Even those who do not respond to the name of Ambā will become devoted to her after being drawn to her by the portrayal of her beauty. And those who read it, appreciating it as a poetic work, will eventually start reading it with devotion. Perhaps the Ācārya must have thought that keeping the name of Ambā hidden and having only "Beauty" as part of the title was the right way to draw all people towards Ambā rather than aim at the small circle of known devotees of Devī.

Beauty itself is that which pertains to Ambā. It is so because the name "Sundarī" itself denotes her (it means the Beautiful One). Though there are longer forms of the name like "Tripurasundarī" and "Mahā-Tripurasundarī", she is basically Sundarī. It is like Śiva being also known as "Paramaśiva", "Sadāśiva" and "Sāmbaśiva". That which denotes a "sundarī" is "saundaryam". The subject of the *Saundaryalaharī,* Mahā-Tripurasundarī, is one of the many forms of Ambā. The presiding deity of the Śrīvidyā mantra-tantra, of Śriyantra (Śrīcakra), etc, is Tripurasundarī.

Is not Ambā also known as Pārvatī, Durgā, Kālī, Bālā, Bhuvaneśvarī and so on? Some of these forms of Devī are beautiful, some are fearful and some combine the qualities of both. Ten names of the deity are mentioned as the graces of Devi--Daśa-Mahā-Vidyā. The śāstra relating to Mahā-Tripurasundarī, that is Rājarājeśvarī, is spoken of as "Sundarī-Vidyā". Among all forms of Ambā she is the most gentle, the most beautiful : hence her name "Sundarī."

"I have had the vision of so may deities. But I have not seen anywhere a beautiful form like that of Tripurasundarī," these words spoken by the Paramahaṁsa (Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa) are to be found in a book on him.

Chapter 14

Names of Ambā : Not Many used in the Hymn

There is something about the hymn that might cause you surprise. It is not in the title of the hymn alone that the name of Tripurasundarī does not figure: throughout the text also it does not. Not in a single stanza out of the one hundred do we find Tripurasundarī, or any Sundarī for that matter, mentioned even once. There are a number of synonyms even for this form of Ambā. Similarly, Naṭarāja, one of the manifestations of Śiva, has synonyms like Sabhāpati, Cidambaranātha, Citsabheśa, Tāṇḍavarāya ... Tripurasundarī is also called Lalitāmbā, Rājarājeśvarī, Kāmākṣī, Kāmeśvarī and so on. But none of these names occurs in any stanza of the *Saundaryalaharī*.

Let us next take the *Śivānandalaharī*. In this composition, you see one or another of the names that are specifically used for Īśvara like Śiva, Paramaśiva, Sadāśiva, Śaṁbhu, Śaṅkara, Paśupati, Mahādeva, Giriśa and Sāmba. If any such name is not used in any one of the stanzas — as if to compensate for this — two or three are used in a succeeding stanza. The name the Ācārya uses most frequently is that of Śaṁbhu. In a number of stanzas he addresses Śiva as "Śaṁbho". Next to Śaṁbhu, the names most often used are Paśupati, Śiva. Then, here and there, we find names like "Svāmī" and "Vibhu" which are not specific to Śiva but are applicable to any god.

It is different with the *Saundaryalaharī*. None of the names that particularly denote the presiding deity of Sundarī vidyā is mentioned in it. Also only very few of the names of the other forms of Ambā are used in the hymn. Among them the most frequently seen are those of Girisutā and Himagirisutā. Names like Śivā, Bhavānī, Umā, Satī, Pārvatī and Candī occur in one or two places. We come across names such as Jananī, Mātā, Ambā and Devī which names can be used to denote any female deity and are not appellations specially signifying Parāśakti inseparably united with Parameśvara. In many stanzas we do not find names belonging to either category, names specially denoting Parāśakti or those that are common to all goddesses.

If nāma rasa[1] is predominant, it will be at the expense of kavitā rasa[2]. It must have been Ambā's resolve that the hymn must be permeated with kavitā rasa. That is why not much importance is given to the different names of Parāśakti or Ambā.

The very first of the 100 stanzas opens with the words, "Śivaḥ Śaktyā". Here we have the extremely significant name of "Śakti" to denote Ambā. Like Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, so Śāktam, which means pertaining to Śakti. Ambā is the power or energy of the Brahman. Śakti conveys the full meaning of the name Ambā. This name (Śakti) which (as we have seen) occurs in the very first stanza of the hymn is not repeated again[3].

There are three stages in the life of a woman and these are characterised by three important relationships. At first she is the daughter of her parents; then she is the wife of her husband; and, finally, she is the mother of her children. Although our hymn mentions very few names of Ambā, it does refer to names of hers that are appropriate to the three stages mentioned above. That it speaks of her as the wife of Parameśvara and as the mother of all of us (all mankind, all beings) is not particularly noteworthy; such references are plentiful in any work devoted to the goddess and written in any language. Among the many uncommon or novel features of the *Saundaryalaharī* (as a hymn to Ambā) is the fact that it has more names conveying the idea of her being a daughter than of her being a wife or mother.

She is called Girisutā because she is the daughter of the Parvatarāja (King of Mountains). Names like Himagirisutā, Śailatanayā, Dharaṇidharakanyā, Pārvatī also occur. As one who symbolises the triumphant flag of the clan of mountains she is called "Nagapati-patākā", "Duhinagiri-vamśadhvajapaṭi", etc. The mother of all worlds is indeed the mother of Himavān also and she becomes his daughter. It was in remembrance of this wonderful phenomenon, in the thought of turning mother into daughter, that the Ācārya has included more names of Ambā denoting her position as daughter.

There are many ways in which we regard God and many ways in which we worship him. Becoming a child ourselves and looking upon the Lord as Mother or Father is what is called the "apatya bhāva". Jñānasaṁbandhar has sung the praises of the Lord from such an angle. The second is the attitude called "vātsalya bhāva". According to this we become mother or father and look upon God as our child, fondle him and dote on him as our child. Tripurasundarī is not the Child Ambā. When she appeared from the sacrificial fire, from the fire of jñāna, she was youthful and of marriageable age. The Child Ambā is called Bālā. In the text of the hymn Ambā is extolled as wife (consort of Śiva), as Mother, as Mahāśakti and so on. Even so, whenever her names are mentioned — and it is often — the Ācārya uses terms suggesting the idea of her being a daughter. It seems he does so in order not to overlook the vātsalya bhāva[g] in adoring her. The latter part of the *Saundaryalaharī* which many people believe was composed by the Ācārya himself is a keśādi-pādānta description of Ambā. In this, in the very first stanza, the Ācārya addresses her as "Himagirisute!" ("O Daughter of Himavān" or "Daughter of the Mountain of Snow"). In the next stanza he refers to her as the consort of Śiva, "Cikura-nikuruṁbam tava Śive". In the concluding stanza of the work he addresses her as "Janani" (Mother) and says : "This hymn which is made up of your own words I offer to you" ("Tvadīyābhirvāgbhistava Janani vācām stutiriyam". The Ācārya refers to her at first as daughter, then as wife and finally as Mother.

In her form of Mother, the Ācārya calls her "Ambā" and "Mātā" in a few places, but otherwise the term he most frequently employs to denote her motherhood is "Jananī". Everything is born of her, all human beings are her children: it must be to make a deep impression of this idea on our minds that he uses the name "Jananī" frequently.

In the last line of the concluding stanza of the first part of the hymn known as "Ānandalaharī", Īśvara and Ambā are jointly referred to as "Janaka-Jananī". This phrase has more significance than "Mātā-Pitā". "Mātā" and "Pitā" have different roots, so they differ in their meanings also. "Mātā" means "one who keeps (things) concealed within her"; while "pitā" means one who protects. "Janaka" and "jananī", on the other hand, are derived from the same root, that is "jan", to give birth to (to procreate).

Names of Ambā : Not Many used in the Hymn

I have been saying that the names of Ambā appear only a few times in the hymn. This seems to proclaim that we must treat divine names with respect and devotion. They are not to be thrown about freely like pearls that are scattered lavishly or carelessly. Think of a gem that is flashed for a moment before you and then withdrawn to be tucked away securely. You must regard similarly the gem that is the divine name, recognizing its priceless nature. You must use it sparingly and guard it with great care. Does a woman mention her husband's name or a pupil his guru's? It is the same (with the names of Devī). But, then, is she not Mother? Don't we have a right over her? Dont't we take liberties with her? But however much we love this Mother and however much we feel free before her, we must not be wanting in respect for her. This Mother is not only the embodiment of love and affection; she is Rājarājeśvarī, the omnipotent one who subjugates all the worlds and rules over them. In her "One Thousand Names", coming immediately after "Śrīmātā" are the names "Śrīmahārājñī" and "Śimhāsaneśvarī" indicating the authority wielded by her. It seems that not many of her names have been mentioned in order not to detract from the royal honour to be accorded her. We refer to the name of a queen only when we feel it is absolutely necessary, but otherwise we refer to her as "Her Majesty"[4].

Notes & References

[1 & 2] An important part of devotion is muttering the names of the deity one worships. "Nāma rasa" is the rasa or the delight derived by the devotee from such muttering of the divine names. "Kavitā rasa" is the aesthetic pleasure gained from poetic descriptions, from poetic fancy.

[3] The word "Śakti" occurs also in the 32nd stanza; but it is used not to address Ambā but to denote the syllables of the Śrividyā mantra.

[4] It must be noted that even in the renowned mantras pertaiming to Devī her names occur rarely.

Chapter 15

On "Ānandalaharī"

Let us consider the title "Ānandalaharī" — the first part of the hymn. It is different from the title of the Ācārya's other work *Śivānandalaharī* ("Śiva" + "Ānandalaharī"). The title of the first part of the present hymn has no prefix to indicate that it is devoted to Ambā. It is merely "Ānandalaharī". Here too we may mention the reasons given earlier. Just as "saundaryam" means Ambā, the hymn intended to extol her becomes *Saundaryalaharī*. In the same way "Ānanda" too is to be identified with her. Just as she is the source of many types of "saundarya" or beauty, she is also the matrix of many types of ānanda or bliss. After all, is not the Mother herself the matrix? The *Taittirīya* and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣads* refer to many gradations of ānanda in an ascending order. We too speak of many kinds of ānanda: Premānanda, Ātmānanda [the Mahāsvāmī continues chuckling to himself] coffee-ānanda, cinema-ānanda, cricket-ānanda, *peccānanda*[1] and the ānanda that contains all these varieties of ānanda, *i.e.* indriyānanda. Then we have śrotrānanda and netrānanda, the joy of listening and seeing. So to distinguish the ānanda from all these types in the hymn of 100 stanzas to Parameśvara, Śivānanda had to be specifically mentioned.

But when we merely say "Ānanda" it means the bliss of Ambā. What [or who] is Ambā? The "cit" of Parameśvara who is "sat". To explain, all experience of ānanda is derived from knowledge. Ambā is this power of cit that is ānanda. Ānanda is the experience that "sat" knows itself through "cit". The many types of joy that we experience are from the reflection of this "cit". The ultimate point of such experience is the non-dualistic bliss we experience by our being dissolved in this cit and becoming the very form of jñāna.

Ambā is rooted in this jñāna. In the *Sahasranāmam* it is mentioned that the bliss known to Brahmā and others is but a drop of the bliss of Ambā— "Svātmānanda-lavī-bhūta-Brahmādyānanda-santatiḥ." That is why the first part of this work which is devoted to Ambā is merely called "Ānandalaharī" without the name of Ambā being added. There is also another hymn by the Ācārya devoted to Ambā and it is also called "Ānandalaharī". In the case of this too, as in that of the "Ānandalaharī" part of the *Saundaryalaharī*, the name of Ambā does not figure in the title. In the first part of the *Saundaryalaharī* (eighth stanza) the term "Cidānandalaharīm" occurs suggesting the utter bliss flowing from Ambā as the embodiment of "cit". If we say "ānanda" alone, without mentioning "cit", it would mean we are speaking about Ambā. That is the reason why the first part of the *Saundaryalaharī* is called merely "Ānandalaharī".

It is said that to remain in a steady state forgetting oneself is to experience the bliss of the Brahman. That is "sat". If, in a sense, it is a condition in which one remains forgetting oneself, in another sense, it is a state in which one is fully aware of oneself. It is a state in which, steeped in Śivam, we are oblivious of ourselves — of what we are in this life of ours with our body and senses — and realize ourselves, that is become aware of the true entity that we are, the entity that is the source of all. In this state the one who knows, the experience of knowing and the knowledge are not three separate factors, but constitute one whole which is the bliss of perceiving all three as one.

If the quiescent "ṣat" that is by itself is Śivam, Ambā is the "cit" that knows and that experiences bliss. If "sat" does not know itself and does not experience itself, is it not like one that is dead? It is when it is not so that the Brahman that is "sat" comes to have Śakti. To know oneself, because of this Śakti, as the One and only Reality and experience the bliss thereof is one state of "sat". There is another state in which, through the Māyā of Śakti, it creates the many worlds and the living beings as though these were outward to itself and conducts them. From knowing oneself inwardly, to create the many worlds and all the living creatures as if they were outside of itself and supporting them — all this is the doing of "sat".

Śivam is nothing but "sat" and when it becomes the embodied Śiva it does many things in sport — all this is the manifestation of the Śakti that is in him. When the Ācārya speaks in the *Saundaryalaharī* of the joy derived from the story told of Śiva being the cause of Śivānanda, it means that Śivam becomes Śiva and that the stories attributed to him are the doing of Ambā. Since the empirical world is entirely hers, Śiva, Viṣṇu and other deities are her making. So too unwise mortals like us, insects and other creatures, Indeed, whatever exist in whatever form and whatever they do, all these come under the province of Ambā, all these are her making. This is what the very first stanza of the *Saundaryalaharī* expresses. So we arrive at the conclusion that if the story of Śiva in *Śivānandalaharī* is a stream of bliss it is the work of Ambā herself. Its greatness also belongs to her. Instead of becoming solid like a rock, Śivānanda rises as a stream: this too is her work.

Ambā is a laharī, a stream or a flood with regard to everything. She who is Saundaryalaharī and Ānandalaharī is also mentioned as Śṛṅgāralaharī (Stanza 16) and Āhlādalaharī (Staza 21), a wave of love and a wave of gladness.

It is Ambā who creates the desire in the Parabrahman to conduct the affairs of the world and to bring freedom for people from worldly existence. Her being united with him is what is called the dāmpatya of Parameśvara and Kāmeśvari [Ambā as Kāmeśvarī and Parameśvara forming a couple.] Kāmeśvarī is the same as Lalitā-Tripurasundarī, the presiding deity of Śrīvidyā. Since she inspires kāma or desire in Īśvara she becomes "Śṛṅgāralaharī". Does not the creative imagination of poets come about in the same manner as the ability of Īśvara to perform the function of creation? The Ācārya uses the term "śṛṅgāralaharī" in this hymn while speaking about the stream of śṛngāra-rasa (the erotic mood or flavour) emanating from those blessed with the poetic gift.

"Āhlādalaharī" is the same as "ānandalaharī". According to the Kuṇḍalinī yoga, those who are freed from mala-māyā (the impurities of worldly existence) on seeing Ambā's "kalā"[5] are immersed in the flood of supreme bliss. It is in this context that the Ācārya uses the term "parama-āhlāda-laharī".

Notes

[1] A Tamil word coined in jest by the Mahāguru to denote the delight people take in gossip.

[2] Sensual pleasure.

[3&4] The joy of listening and the joy of seeing (the joy experienced by the ears and the eyes).

[5] "Kalā" signifies the degree of Ambā's beauty. Devī is said to shine in sixteen kalās and is called "Śodaśa-kalā-rūpiṇī".

Chapter 16

Appreciating Beauty is its own Reward

In the *Śivānandalaharī* it is said that the flood of Śivānanda rises from the story of Śiva, that it washes away the impurity of sin, that it appeases the torment of worldly existence and that it fills the pool of consciousness. But in the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 44) in which the term "saundaryalaharī" occurs nothing similar is spoken (about what beauty or the flood of beauty does). In it the Ācārya does no more than mention that the parting of the hair on Ambā's head serves as a channel for the beauty flowing from her face. When describing beauty with poetic flavour and imagination there is no need to go into explanations or clarifications of anything. Nor is there any need to resort to a philosophical discussion or to allegories. The Ācārya, in composing his hymn, seems to suggest that those who have the capacity to recognize beauty and take delight in it will do so for no purpose other than that of deriving aesthetic pleasure from it. [They will appreciate beauty for its own sake.]

The flood of Ambā's beauty, it must be said, washes away our sins and is a remedy for our torments and fevers; it fills the lake of our heart. But it is not necessary to mention all the good it does in order to exalt it. It is such that it is "self-exalted". When you take a dip in the Gaṅgā you are at once freed from your sins, sorrows and fevers. But, having had your bath, do you feel like reaching for the shore at once? You feel like remaining immersed in it for long or you like to keep swimming in it as long as you like. It is not that you bathe in it for your sins to be washed away or for your troubles to be dissolved. There is the joy of just bathing in the river. The Ācārya shows that the same is the case with our being immersed in the flow of Ambā's beauty and experiencing the joy of remaining plunged in it.

In the *Śivānandalaharī* the Ācārya says that the flood of Śivānanda rises from the story of Īśvara. In this hymn, although he speaks of "vadana-saundaryalaharī", that is Ambā's beauty welling up from her face, her beauty is not confined to her face. She is a flow of beauty from head to foot (keśādi-pādāntam). In the stanza (12) beginning with the words "tvadīyam saundaryam", her entire beauty is depicted. Just as ānandalaharī rises from the sport (līlā) of Śiva, from the functions performed by him, saundaryalaharī flows from Ambā's person. Īśvara who has many exploits to his credit, has many functions to perform, many roles to play (for Śivānanda to well up and flow); but Ambā has nothing to do; she is by herself a flood of beauty.

In the *Śivānandalaharī*, Īśvara's sport is described as manifested in various ways. It is different in the *Saundaryalaharī*, in which none of the stories relating to Ambā, like the one about the slaying of Bhaṇḍāsura is told. In it only her physical form is portrayed and this itself the Ācārya shows to be a source of great bliss. There is no description of Īśvara in the *Śivānandalaharī*, part by part, as there is of Ambā in the *Saundaryalaharī*. The "techniques" adopted by the Ācārya in the two poems are different.

In portraying the body, there is one order for male deities and another for female deities. The former have to be depicted from the feet to the head. This is known by various names : "pādādi-keśāntam" (from the feet to the hair on the head), "āpādamastakaṁ" (from the feet to the head), "nakha-śikhā-paryantaṁ" (from the toenails to the hair on the head). The reverse order is observed for female deities : from the tresses of hair, the poet goes on to portray the forehead, the eyes and so on down to the feet. This is "keśādi-pādāntam". This order is adopted in the first part of the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmaṁ* (The One Thousand Names of Lalitā) and in the *Saundaryalaharī*.

In the *Śivānandalaharī* there is no description of the physical form of Śiva. But its author, the Ācārya, has himself composed an independent hymn to Śiva in which there is a pādādi-keśānta portrait of the Lord. Not satisfied with this, he has, besides, written another poem in which he has given us a keśādi-pādānta description also of Īśvara. After all, Śiva is half of Mother, so he must have thought it justified to do another hymn to him in which he has adopted the order in which female deities are to be portrayed.

In the *Saundaryalaharī* Ambā is not mentioned as merely half of Īśvara's body. She is indeed his entire body as we notice from the words, "śarīram tvam Śaṁbhoḥ" (Stanza 34). When we see that the Śivam that has no form and has no function to perform becomes Śiva through the greatness of Śakti, we realise that she indeed is the cause not only of his body but of all his doings. In the "Laharī" relating to Śiva, the Ācārya describes the enchanting story of his sport and in the "Laharī" relating to Ambā he depicts the beauty of her body : thus he makes the flavour or rāsa of joy flow in two different ways.

We become immersed in bliss when the picture of Ambā's beauty is impressed within us. There is nothing in this context for us to think about or discuss as it would be the case if we were to come across stories or other accounts relating to a deity. When there is an object of the utmost grace and beauty we keep on looking at it and derive a sense of fullness from it. In this there is no effort on our part; all we do is gaze at the beautiful object and derive the utmost bliss.

There are two extremely easy ways of grasping the Lord : chanting his names repeatedly and meditating on his form. These two are together called "nāma-rūpa". To keep muttering the names of the Lord does not involve any effort. The second easy way is to have *darshan* of an auspicious image of a deity with our outward eye (physical eye) or with our mind's eye. Great men see before their physical eye divine forms as a living reality. We are able to see with our outward eye only deities carved in stone, that is idols and so on. It is only with our mind's eye that we can picture to ourselves deities as living realities moving about in our midst. Even an idol is a living entity since life is instilled into it at the time of its installation. Vaiṣṇavas exalt such an idol calling it an "arccāvatāra". So by going to the temple and having *darshan* of the deity in it we become enchanted by the idol and without any effort on our part keep thinking of the Lord.

Much has been said about the glory of the names of the Lord. But in our present immature state we cannot become easily devoted to God by merely chanting his names. We need to link the name to a form, keep the mind drawn towards it and fixed in devotion. When we chant "Rāma, Rāma", we automatically think of Rāma in his emerald-green form, bearing the bow called Kodaṇḍa. For ordinary people to repeat the names of a deity without linking it to a form is a matter of extreme drabness.

When one is performing japa in the prescribed manner one is advised to recite the dhyāna-ślokag pertaining to the deity concerned so that its form will be fixed in one's mind.

(As a way of devotion) chanting repeatedly the names of the Lord seems more difficult than contemplating or seeing his form. To think of a beautiful divine form is easier and more joyous than all other means of devotion.

That is why in this Laharī (in this hymn) there is no reference to its origin (the source of the Lahari), the course it takes and the place where it empties itself. Suppose you have a high-quality *rasālu*[1] mango. What gives you joy is the eating of it. Do you worry about how or where it grew, where or how it ripened, what it will do when you take it in?

We have obtained the *Saundaryalaharī* as a *rasālu* mango soaked in the divine ambrosia. This hymn which describes the beauty of Ambā has itself come to be her form (her embodiment in verse). The subject that is praised, the one who praises and the praise (that is the hymn) are all one. When one reads the hymn, steeping oneself deeper and deeper in it, one becomes that which one reads. One becomes Ambā herself and obtains liberation, the state in which one is oneself and one is all.

Note

[1] A type of succulent mango as the name itself suggests.

Chapter 17

What is Beauty?

Do you think I am exaggerating?[1] It is true that when you see a beautiful object you feel delighted for a moment. "But how could you say," you may ask, "that we would be rewarded with fullness when we see Ambā's cascading beauty? How could you say that by being steeped in it we would attain Advaitānanda, in other words the mokṣa that is the bliss of becoming one with the Brahman? We look at a lotus or the full moon and we are happy. But will such happiness result in the great bliss called mokṣa?"

We see that poets who have aesthetic experience of a pellucid nature discern God in beauty and even know the bliss of being aware of the Brahman. From their descriptions of nature itself we can infer that through the contemplation of nature itself they experience unalloyed beatitude.

What exactly is the aesthetic experience of poetry? It is the joy derived from appreciating beauty. Rhetoricians, authors of works on poetics like Abhinavagupta and Jagannātha Paṇḍita[2], avow that such an experience of poetic beauty may afford us Brahmānanda that is momentary if not everlasting. Abhinavagupta says so on the basis of Kāśmirī Śaivism which is close to Advaita. (I shall speak about this discipline later.) As for Jagannātha Paṇḍita, he speaks of the aesthetic experience of poetic beauty leading to Brahmānanda on the basis of Advaita itself.

What is poetry? Does it not mean nature and man depicted in a beautiful manner, taking into account all the characteristics of nature and all the natural qualities of man? In our day-to-day life we keep observing both. And though our life is a whirl in the midst of nature and men we do not see anything in them that gives us delight. But when we see them or have experience of them (nature and the natural qualities of fellow humans) portrayed in poetry or drama don't we realize that they appeal to our aesthetic sensibilities? What is the reason for this? Is it not because they, nature and man, are presented in a manner that arouses our sense of beauty? So the experience gained from poetry is the experience gained from beauty. Great writers of alankāra śāstra have shown that such an experience of beauty can lead us to liberation.

In European countries too there have been nature poets[3] who, steeped in the beauty of nature, have found the Godhead in it. In our own country Rabīndranāth Tāgore has expressed the view that to experience beauty is to come face to face with God. When we say "sat-cit-ānanda" (existence-consciousness-bliss), it means that jñāna and ānanda are indissolubly united with "sat" or truth. Similarly, the good and the beautiful are also inseparably connected with truth. This is part of the creed of the Brāhmo Samāj[4] which had the support of Tagore. It is in pursuance of this idea that the Brāhmo Samāj speaks of "Satyam-Śivam-Sundaram", which is similar to sat-cit-ānanda. "Śivam" means good. Everybody knows that "sundaram" means beautiful. The underlying idea is that beauty is part of the concept of the Parabrahman. It also means that appreciating beauty fully and in the right manner is to experience Brahmānanda.

However, many of us do not seem to know what exactly is meant by "the right manner" of appreciating beauty. We do not know how to give over our mind entirely to experiencing beauty. Also most of us are not mature enough to perceive the Godhead in beauty. Our appreciation of beauty and the happiness we derive from it are momentary. Most of us are unable to devote ourselves to beauty and to regard it as a means of release from worldly existence.

What is it that appears beautiful to us? That which gives us joy, happiness, we call beautiful. If we feel the urge to look at an object again and again it means it is beautiful.

Here I must add an important qualifying clause. The joy that we experience must not be such as to disturb our mind or make us emotionally unbalanced. When we see an object it must fill our minds with delight that is pure and serene; only then can it be called beautiful. If a man evinces a great liking for scenes of cruelty or for obscene erotic gestures and feels happy about the same, they cannot for that reason be called beautiful. It is important that the person who experiences beauty is in a good state of mind.

There is one more point to be considered. The object that looks enchanting must not cause us fear, sorrow or anger. Suppose there is a vast lush green valley surrounded by mountains. Or imagine there is a river that tumbles down from a spot as high as four coconut trees placed one upon another. We can appreciate their beauty only from a safe distance. If we go to the edge of the valley to have a better view of it we will be afraid of slipping and falling down. If we go close to the waterfall there is the risk of our being swept away by it. In either case we will be in no mood to appreciate its beauty.

A serpent looks so smooth and shiny as if an accomplished artist has applied colour to it and drawn stripes on it — and see how beautifully it glides, twisting and turning its body glistening in the sun. But are we in a mood to stand and gaze at it and admire its beauty? No, we flee from it in terror. Or take the example of a tiger or a cheetah. If we see them roaming freely in the open instead of being shut up in a cage we will be gripped by fear. Only a wise sage who has perfected himself, a siddha, can happily approach a snake and sing to it, "Dance, O snake, dance." Only a great poet[5] can find delight in writing a poem, inspired by the beauty of a tiger, not we. We become aware of the beauty of an object only when it does not create fear in us and when we feel we are not endangered by it. Take the case of a lotus or the full moon. We appreciate the colour, the tenderness and fragrance of the former and the coolness of the latter. However much jasmines look pretty do we appreciate them if we see a snake hanging from the *paṇḍāl* on which the jasmine creeper winds itself?

Now about human beings. We appreciate the looks of a person only if there is love as well as affection in him. Or take the example of a man of wealth and influence, a capitalist. He may have good looks but we would not like him if he shouts at us angrily for nothing or threatens to victimise us for no reason.

Unlike in the case of inanimate objects like flowers, cloudscapes at dawn or dusk, we can fully appreciate the looks of living creatures, whether human beings, animals, or birds, only when they interact with us in an affectionate manner. Perhaps they need not even be affectionate. For instance, we may appreciate the good looks of human beings to some extent if they do not arouse in us fear or sorrow or they do not have ill feelings towards us. But if their good looks are combined with love how much more do we like them.

We keep looking again and again at people who are the picture of love whether they are handsome or not. This leads us to the conclusion that it is love that is transformed into beauty. Let a mother be utterly dark in complexion and let her be ungainly with protruding teeth. But her child keeps clinging to her and refuses to go to anybody else. If a neighbour tries to take it in her arms and fondle it, it turns away in fear from her, good-looking though she is, and goes and hugs its mother, however unpretty she may be.

What is the reason for this? The child knows its mother, how much she loves it. Aṣṭāvakra (as his very name suggests) had eight bodily distortions. But he was much sought after by the learned. Then there are so many great men, realised souls, accomplished men (*i.e.* siddhas) who are unattractive to look at or who may appear even fearsome or moronic. But people flock to them, besiege them, to have a glimpse of them. In fact, they look at them again and again. Indeed they do not take their eyes off them. Why do they do so? It is the compassion of the great men, their inner grace, their power to bless that draw people to them. They must be said to be beautiful according to the definition, "Beauty is that which we gaze at, turning back to see it again and again." There is a saying, "The beauty within one is visible outside on one's face." In the same way, speaking about the great men referred to above, their inner compassion, the compassion in their hearts, triumphs over their unpleasing physical appearance and gives them a rich veneer of handsomeness.

In sum, the beauty of a living being grows as the love evinced by the same increases. When this love reaches an exalted stage the beauty of form (or of the body) ceases to have any meaning and now love itself is revealed as beauty.

It we have the urge to look at an object again and again it is because of the delight we derive from doing so. Foremost in the matter of making us happy is love. And there is no joy equal to that derived from love. So the love that bestows joy by itself becomes beauty. We desire to keep on gazing again and again at the man who is beautiful because of his loving nature.

Notes & References

[1] The reference is to what is said in the concluding para of the previous chapter.

[2] Abhinavagupta (10th-11th centuries), famous for the theory of rasa he propounded. Jagannātha Paṇḍita (17th century) flourished as a court poet during the reign of Shāh Jahān.

[3] The Great Ācārya is presumably referring to the Lake Poets like Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Coleridge (1772-1834).

[4] The Brāhmo Samāj was founded by Rām Mohan Roy (1772-1833).

[5] The Mahāguru is apparently referring to William Blake (1757-1827) and his poem, "The Tyger". Opening lines: "Tyger! Tyger! burning bright/In the forests of the night....."

Chapter 18

Ambā : Beauty that is Full, Love that is Total

What is Ambā like? If she is the embodiment of beauty, she is also the embodiment of love. She is indeed love that is beauty. Sugar imparts sweetness to any dish. Similarly, whatever beautiful objects you see and wherever you see them, the basic ingredient of all that beauty is derived from Ambā: she is indeed the matrix of all beauty. She is Śakti, the power of the Brahman, and hers is beauty that is full and entire. Droplets of it are sprinkled on all other forms and objects of beauty. [To paraphrase the Great Master's statement: "Ambā is the fountain of all beauty and all beautiful things are beautiful because they are tinged with her beauty."]

It is Ambā's inner being of grace that has taken the form of beauty flowing in a flood.

Love is formless and an abstract concept. We see in this world people who are affectionate but outwardly unpleasing in appearance. In the same way there are people lacking in affection but outwardly good to look at. However, where there is love it triumphs over physical features to give the person concerned the glow of beauty. It means that love that has no form is somehow reflected in the form of the person referred to. As for Ambā, love is not merely reflected in her form, she is the very form of love, love that has become the parts of her body. Love that has no form becomes the beauty of her form. In her the fullness of love is transformed into the fullness of beauty.

Is it not because children [that is mankind] cannot comprehend It that Śakti, the Power of the formless Parabrahman, has taken the form of Ambā? Since she has assumed this form out of her love and compassion, is it not the embodiment of love itself? The purpose of Ambā assuming her supremely lovely body is to make all people, including the unintelligent and the immature, to give up their attachment to beauty in all its petty and tawdry forms and to turn to her. Her great charm is nothing but the outcome of her compassion. She is in fact the embodiment of the beauty that is her compassion. In the case of human beings there is no connection between their inner feelings of love and their outward looks. Not so in the case of Ambikā. Her inner love is her outward bodily beauty. This is particularly true of her form of Tripurasundarī, the presiding deity of Śrīvidyā. The name has a philosophical import. But let that be......

There are a number of words that go to show that beauty and love are one and the same. The qualifying word "su" (used as a prefix) has two meanings: that which is good and that which is beautiful. "Suguṇa" is "good quality"; "surūpa" is "beautiful form or body". What exactly is "good", a word we often use? Love is something that is extremely good. We say *"Anbe Śivam"*[1] (Love it is that is Śivam). "Śivam" and "śubham" mean the same. "Śubham" means "good". Among all those that are good what must be regarded as the highest? Is it not love? So "śubham" means love. The word "śobhā" is derived from "śubha". We use the word "śubha" with "śobhanam" : for instance, "śubha śobhanam". "Śobhā" means beauty. When we speak of "śobhā" as being derived from "śubha" it means the same as saying that beauty is derived from love. Among śubha or auspicious functions we refer chiefly to "kalyāṇam" [this word is popularly used in the South for marriage]. In the marriage invitation card we have the term "śubha muhūrta patrikā". Among the many meanings of "kalyaṇa" one is "that which is good", which means "love". Another meaning is "beauty". The term "Śivam-Sundaram" must have come to be used in this manner. "Śivam" is "Sundareśvara": he is the god whose inner love assumes his beautiful form.

Since Ambā is love manifested as beauty, to be steeped in the flood of her beauty is to be dissolved in love. It takes one to the non-dualistic state of her inner being and to Ātmānanda, the bliss of the Self. If there is beauty independent of love it means no more than transient joy. If love itself becomes beauty? What better means there can be for everlasting bliss, for ānanda unsurpassed, than the compassion of Parāśakti or her grace? It is because we experience that love itself as beauty that it becomes the means of our final emancipation.

"Anbe Śivamavā(tu) ārum arindapin[2]
Anbe Śivamay amarndirundāre"
— from Tirumūlar's ''Tirumantiram''.

After being melted in this love (the love of Parāśakti) and dissolved in it we can ourselves become It, become She, become one without a second (Advaita). This state of inseparable union is referred to in the stanzas beginning with the words "Bhavāni tvam" (Stanza 22) and "Sarasvatyā Lakṣmyā" (Stanza 99).

So it is no exaggeration to say that one can achieve liberation through beauty, through divine beauty.

How do we picture Ambā to ourselves, imagine her form? Is her complexion green, red or dark? All these different colours are ascribed to her in her different forms. Brahmā has four heads, Śiva five, Subrahmaṇya six. How many heads does Ambā have? According to the Vedas, the viśvarūpa or virāṭarūpa (the cosmic form of the Lord) has a thousand heads ("sahasraśirṣam"). But we cannot comprehend such a form, or perceive it with our physical eye. Ambā has many forms, from Mīnākṣī with two hands to Mahiṣāsuramardinī with eighteen. It is all how the sages, each of them, have had their vision of her. So how do we visualise her, with how many hands? In one of her aspects she is with matted and dishevelled hair; in another she wears a crown; and in a third she is bejewelled all over. She is also represented wearing no clothes at all, blood smeared on her body and wearing a garland of skulls. Considering all such different images how do we picture to ourselves Ambā's form?

What is the answer to this question? "Whatever her form or aspect, love is her most important characteristic. So think of her as the embodiment of love."

"If there is somewhere a good soul who feeds people with all his heart, without expecting any reward, go and see him, see his face. Note how the donor is happier than the donee. When you see such a scene, does not your own heart melt a little? Are you not moved by the sight? Think of the love and joy revealed on the face of the man who feeds people once a day or twice, feeds a hundred people or one thousand. This love and joy must be multiplied many, many times in the case of Ambā who has been feeding billions and billions of living beings for eons and eons, feeding even people guilty of terrible sins. Some may not have actually committed sins but must have, all the same, harboured sinful thoughts. Ambā is supreme love and compassion. Compassion indeed is loveliness. Without it bodily beauty is no beauty at all. We do not like to see our face in a mirror when we are angry or sorrowful. If we suffer from a slight fever, our body loses its charm. True bodily beauty is that of Ambā who is not affected by either anger or sorrow or illness: She is always the picture of love. So in your imagination try to visualise love in the highest form possible. And take that love to be the form of Ambā."

"After having said that Ambā is the power belonging to the quiescent Brahman in its entirety, why should she be specially spoken of as love alone? If there exist in this world suffering, hatred and fear, are not these also derived from the power of the Paramātman? Then why should It – and She (Ambā) — be spoken of as love alone?"

Does not love exist in many forms in the world? The affection of a mother, the attachment of a brother, the intimacy of a friend, the love between husband and wife, the devotion of *adiyars*[3], the compassion of the great, all these come under love. And do not all these originate from Parāśakti, from her love? So meditate on her as love. She is indeed all, even anger and fear, but if you think of her in these aspects you will not obtain happiness or peace of mind. You must think of her as the personification of love, a form that will be dear to you, and will bring you peace of mind. In keeping with your own limitations and nature, see the limitless in a limited form. Parāśakti knows no limits, but for your own sake place a limit on her and see her in the form of love. But meditate on that form of love, on the love that she is, as being limitless, boundless.

The Gaṅgā is Gaṅgā all the way from Gomukhī to the ocean. But will you be able to bathe where she tumbles down, roaring, from the high Himālayan hills? Even during her course through the plains you will have to choose a spot to bathe where the river is not too deep, where there are no whirlpools and where it is not infested with crocodiles. Although the river is all Gaṅgā throughout, you descend into it only at the spot where you can bathe happily and comfortably. In the same way, though Parāśakti has different qualities, "good" and "bad", if you wish to worship her in the way you feel comfortable and happy, meditate on her as the Good One, as the Loving One. This is the reason why the great have held her as the Paramātman's power of compassion.

The Paramātman and Parāśakti are worshipped as the universal monarch and queen, as Father and Mother, as Śiva and Ambā, as Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī. In Siddhānta-Śaivism, Ambā is chiefly Śiva's power for grace. Similarly, in the Vaiṣṇava system Lakṣmī is the "puruṣakāram" that prompts Mahāviṣṇu to be compassionate. This system is called Śrīvaiṣṇavism and it must have taken its name from the fact that prime consideration is given in it to the compassion of Lakṣmī : that is why "Śrī" (meaning Lakṣmī) figures first in the name.

It is not correct to say that love is just one among the many qualities of Parāśakti. It is the foremost of her attributes. If she is associated with other qualities it is to show up her love as a diamond sparkling in a dark velvet setting. That is why in spite of her other forms which are fierce she appears as a flood of love, a flood of beauty. If this were not so, would people in Beṅgāḷ and Keraḷa keep chanting her name in devotional fervour as "Mā! Mā!" or as " *Amme*, Bhagavatī"? If such a one appears in her beautiful form would the devout want anything more, ask for anything more?

Ambikā is a flood of beauty that will sweep away all our impurities like desire and anger, sorrow and fear, and the greatest fear of all, the fear of rebirth or worldly existence. That beauty bestows all good fortune on us. The word "bhāgya" is from "bhaga" meaning "excellent". The one in whom exist all "bhagas" is "Bhagavān"; "Bhagavatī" is its feminine gender. The prefix "su" is added to "bhāgya" to form the word "saubhāgya" which means "extremely auspicious". "Su" means "good" and from it is derived "sau" in the same way as "saukhyam" is derived from "sukham". Ambā as Tripurasundarī personifies all saubhāgya. So to think of her is to be rewarded with all good fortune, all well-being. The Ācārya says (in Stanza 44 of the *Saundaryalaharī*): "Tanotu kṣemam nastava vadana-saundaryalaharī". "The beauty rising as a flood from your face, O Mother, may it create our well-being." Since it creates well-being, we understand that Ambā's beauty itself grants us every kind of good fortune.

"May her beauty create well-being for all of us," says the Ācārya. "Naḥ" means "for us". The Ācārya does not ask for *his* well-being alone but for the well-being of all of us. Just as it rains for all, may well-being be universal. This is the Ācārya's prayer inspired by his compassion for all beings, a prayer for the good of all creatures including those who cannot have a glimpse of her. This is reminiscent of the Gāyatrī mantra which contains a prayer for the cleansing of the intellect of all of us.

A man given to peevish argument said: "After all the Gāyatrī is a prayer on behalf of all of us. So it would be enough if someone other than I chants it; there is no need for me to recite it." This is not right; for everyone may choose to think that "someone else" would chant the Gāyatrī for him. Many are not entitled to chant the mantra, women, children, the ailing, those who are made impure by a death in their family, and so on. Keeping them in mind it is that the mantra includes the words "our intellect" (or "our intelligence"). If one is entitled to chant the Gāyatrī — and there is nothing to prevent one from doing it — and one does not chant it, the Lord too will have his reasons to say *"Nahi"* (that is he will not bestow his blessings on that man).

I spoke to you about the Ācārya's prayer to Ambā: "May the beauty of your face create well-being for all of us" (that is for all people in the world). If what looks good to the eye also causes well-being, then beauty and grace must be combined in it. Ambā's compassionate heart it is that is the embodiment of her beauty -- and the purpose of the same is creating universal welfare. And here it is confirmed that it is the inner being of grace that becomes the flood of beauty.

Notes & References

1 *"Anbe Śivam"* : a Tamiḷ saying, meaning "Śiva is the embodiment of love and kindness."

2 "Śiva is not something different from kindness (love). Those who know the state of Śivam will remain as kindness alone. Thereby they will become like Śiva and live as such."

3 *Aḍiyār* is a Tamiḷ word meaning a devotee, one who carries on his head (or supports with his head) the feet of the deity he worships.

Chapter 19

The Hymn Itself a Portrait of Ambikā

The qualities or attributes of Ambā are not distinct from her form. This hymn also is not something that is separate from her. Just as her infinite auspicious attributes have assumed a keśādi-pāda form through the parts of her body, the very keśādi-pāda description of her body constitutes her verbal form.

While concluding a devotional composition it is customary to mention the specific fruits or rewards to be gained by reading the same. It is called the "phala-śruti". In the concluding stanza of the *Saundaryalaharī* the Ācārya says in all humility that it was out of unthinking rashness on his part that he composed the hymn to Ambā using a few words from her own verbal cosmos. The stanza previous to this is something like a phala-śruti. I say "something like a phala-śruti" advisedly because there is no mention in it of the specific rewards to be obtained by reciting the hymn. There is only a general statement that he who worships Ambā will be blessed with certain rewards. What these are I shall tell you when I come to the stanza. What I wish to state here is that the Ācārya, instead of mentioning the benefits to be obtained by reciting his hymn, speaks only of the fruits yielded by worshipping Ambā. Why has he done so? Two reasons may be mentioned. Since the Ācārya does not possess the least trace of ego he is averse to claiming that the hymn composed by him has the power to bring rewards. The second reason is the hymn itself is the form of Ambā, her verbal personification. So to read or recite it is to worship her. When the work extolling Ambā is itself her embodiment, the fruits yielded by reciting it must be the same as those yielded by worshipping her. This is the meaning conveyed by the stanza (99). The *Saundaryalaharī* is nothing but the beauty of Parāśakti that has come to us as the Bhagavatpāda's work of verbal beauty. Ambā's beauty that is like *rasālu*[1] is soaked in the Ācārya's poetical ambrosia divine.

Reference

[1] See "Note", Chapter 16.

Chapter 20

"Ānandalaharī": Advaita and Śākta

As already noted, the latter part of the *Saundaryalaharī* depicts the beauty of Ambā, while the former part is predominantly devoted to a description of her śakti or power. It is the latter part that is truly "Saundarylaharī"; the former part is "Ānandalaharī".

The very first stanza of the hymn starts with a glorification of Śakti. Then why is the first part called "Ānandalaharī" and not "Śaktilaharī"?

This ānanda or bliss [dealt with in the first part of the hymn] arises from the knowledge called "cit". This cit-knowledge is the Brahman becoming aware of Itself and it is what is meant by jñāna. Well, what is the meaning of knowing oneself? Realising one's inward state that is still, serene and unwavering is the final message or teaching of Advaita. But what do the Śākta śāstras say? They too speak of the still, serene and unwavering inner state, also the entity that has no attributes and has no function to perform or has nothing to "do". But, along with all this, they say: "Is not the Brahman the basis of the active, phenomenal world? Is it not the support of all the qualities connected with it?" The Śākta system also asks: "Is it not a great śakti that supports the phenomenal world and conducts it?" It tries to establish that the quiescent Brahman itself inheres such a great power.

The Ācārya has composed the *Saundaryalaharī* in the nature of a Śākta treatise. Seen from the standpoint of the Śākta system, the cit of the Brahman, the jñāna that experiences itself, is not only the awareness of the inner non-dualistic state of tranquillity; it is also the knowledge of how it is the basis of the dualistic world manifested outside. The Śākta doctrine gives importance to that aspect of the realisation of the Brahman which is imbued with Śakti. A system based on Śakti cannot be anything else. The Śakti it speaks of is the form of cit, consciousness, knowledge.

The same individual cannot have two types of awareness. So, according to the Śākta system, she (Śakti) is also the Brahman's awareness of inner serenity. In the Brahman, that is sat-cit-ānanda, the eternal Śiva is sat; Ambā is its awareness or cit. We cannot think of sat without any awareness, or of cit without the basis of sat. So Śiva and Śakti, who are sat and cit, are always together or exist in union. The one does not exist without the other.

What is ānanda [with reference to sat-cit-ānanda]? The question arises when we consider the title "Ānandalaharī" (of the first section of the hymn). The Brahman experiencing the fullness arising from the awareness that it is imbued with cit is ānanda or bliss. According to Advaita, such bliss is the Brahman experiencing jñāna in the state in which it is tranquil and in which it has no attributes. The Śākta system does not raise any objection to it. But in the manner cit is spoken of, it gives importance to the sport of Śakti — and it speaks of both cit and Śakti. To explain, the cit that is the awareness of the Brahman reveals its power and finds fulfilment in its sport of the dualistic cosmos. So, cidānanda, it says, is also Śakti-vilāsa-ānanda, the bliss arising from the sport of Śakti.

However, one point deserves to be mentioned here. It is not customary to speak of "Śaktyānanda" in the same way as we speak of Śivānanda or śāntānanda. Since Śiva denotes the serene sadvastu (Reality), Śivānanda also means śāntānanda. Mention of Brahmānanda too brings to mind the bliss that is associated with the tranquil. When we speak of Ātmānanda, we think of the experience of a state which is not associated with Śakti or any activity, not with something which has any attributes: it is an experience of a state which is by itself and which has neither any attributes nor any function to perform. Why so? If there is something called Śakti, how do we recognise its existence? It must be manifested and the function performed by it must be known. When it is still and quiescent how will it know Śakti, experience it or know what is in it? We jivātmans (individual souls) are unable to know our serene inner state when we are involved in any work or activity. When we "do" something our tranquillity is disturbed. We are drawn by external forces, dragged by them, and we remain all the time wavering. We ask ourselves: "When will all this end? Will we ever remain peaceful, without anything to *do*?"

When the Ācārya established the Advaita system he saw the phenomenal world as an illusory mirage and he brushed it aside completely and taught us to remain fixed in the serene Ātman. Only then would the individual Self be realised as the Brahman Itself. According to the Advaita discipline the individual Self can achieve the non-functioning and still state of the Brahman, but it is obvious that it cannot become the omnipotent entity that is the source of all activity. Śākta tantras like Śrīvidyā also speak of liberation, of the individual Self becoming inseparably united with the Brahman. They further state that Parāśakti herself blesses the individual Self with mokṣa. Since utter bliss, the ultimate state, does not relate to Śakti and since such bliss is associated with quiescence, Advaita speaks of Śivānanda and śāntānanda, but there is no mention in it of anything like Śaktyānanda.

But in the Śākta discipline cidānanda is chiefly Śaktyānanda.

The Brahman, which stands for the great jñāna, is imbued with cit and its bliss is cidānanda. It is the same as jñānānanda. In the Śākta system when this cidānanda is referred to, Ambā herself being cit incarnate, the joy that is hers in her sport of creating the dualistic world is specially mentioned.

Advaita does not explicitly mention the association of Śakti with the Brahman. According to it, the dualistic universe is caused by Māyā of which we do not know the whys and wherefores. In it cidānanda is nothing but śāntānanda. According to the Śākta system, Ambā is engaged in her cosmic function for her sport; she is both the universal and the outward and indeed all. She is the embodiment of cidānanda and she experiences bliss both in the quiescent inner jñāna and in the outward jñāna characterised by power.

According to Advaita, the Parabrahman has no outward jñāna; indeed it cannot have it. To associate it with dualism[1] is to make it impure and to do so is a sacrilege. Not so in the Śākta system. To savour the rasa of the divine sport, the still inwardly turned Brahman becomes unstill and is outwardly turned as Śakti. The Śākta system glorifies this Śakti. The very first stanza of our hymn is a paean of praise to this aspect of Śakti.

The individual Self cannot, on its own, realise the peaceful state and find fulfilment. However, the Śākta system shows a way for an individual to find joy in Ambā's power and glory. What the Advaita system dismisses as the dualistic empirical world of Māyā that we do not comprehend, the Śākta system describes as the sport of Ambā in which we find delight. The individual Self cannot achieve non-dualistic union in Śakti, it can have the same only in the quietudinous Brahman; according to the Śākta doctrine it can share in Ambā's joy arising from her power which is the nature of cidānanda.

Great men like the Ācārya, who had Advaitik experience, performed their wordly duties and also engaged themselves in devotion in this state. But they did not elaborate on this aspect since they were mainly concerned with making men go directly to the goal of tranquillity. The Śākta and other systems like bhakti clearly and explicitly deal with the joy of experiencing the sport of the Lord. In some places, this joy is elevated to a plane higher than Advaitik bliss.

The divine play originates in Śakti: there is immense joy in sporting. That is why the part dealing with the power of Ambā [her līlā] is called "Ānandalahari".

Did I not tell you that Śakti and cit are referred to as being identical? In keeping with this idea, in one of the stanzas (8) in the "Ānandalahari" section occurs the term "cidānandalahari": "Bhajantitvām dhanyāḥ katicana cidānandalaharīm". It means: "A few extremely fortunate people worship you, knowing you as a flow of cidānanda."

The *Saundaryalaharī,* the flow of beauty, is meant not only for those who can have direct *darshan* of Ambā. It can be appreciated by all and, through the Ācārya's description of her, they can perceive her with their mind's eye. But only a few rare and fortunate people — "katicana dhanyāḥ" — can have the perception of her cidānandalaharī which is her śaktilaharī.

Let it be that we cannot grasp the great concept called cidānanda. After all, Ambā's beauty itself gives us great joy, does it not? Is not that beauty capable of giving us everything including the ultimate bliss of liberation? So let us be satisfied with what little we know about cidānanda and other matters mentioned in the hymn.

There is much to speak about the points on which Advaita and the Śrīvidyā system agree and those on which they differ.

Agreement means complete identity. According to Brahmavidyā or the Advaita discipline, the individual Self, at the end of sādhana or spiritual endeavour, becomes one with the Brahman. The Śrīvidyā system also speaks of such oneing but it differs with Advaita on the subject of creation. In Brahmavidyā creation is explained according to "vivartavāda" and in the Śrīvidyā system according to "ābhāsavāda". "Vivarta" means false appearance; for instance, a rope appearing to be a serpent. The rope is the reality, the serpent is the falsity or the untruth. It is the reality (of the rope) that looks like the falsity (of the serpent). According to Advaita, the reality that is the Brahman appears as the false living world. "Ābhāsa" means "reflected light". For example, the sun shines reflected in the water. The Śākta system believes that the plenary citśakti, within a certain discipline, is reflected as the living universe (actually many universes). Without the original sun there is no reflected image of it: it is the sun that appears as its image in the water. Which means the Śākta system is basically Advaitik. But [with regard to the sun and its reflected image] we must see that the sun outside is one entity, its reflection in the water is another. To that extent the image has an element of reality. In the same way, there is an element of reality in the phenomenal world (jīva-jagat). The Śākta system does not hold the view that this phenomenal world (the reflected image) is false as does Advaita which calls it a "mithyā" or a lie.

Since there is no room for asking the question of how Māyā came to be, Advaita dismisses the phenomenal world as a myth (mithyā). The Śākta doctrine, on the other hand, has it that in the sport of Ambā the power of her cit is reflected as countless images. In this way she remains active in multitudinous ways. The Śākta doctrine holds the view that, basing ourselves on the jīva-jagat or empirical world, we must use our senses, the various objects in the world, etc., as instruments to achieve union with the real and eternal Brahman.

What all of us desire is this ultimate state of union with the Brahman. All our sādhana must be aimed at it. There is nothing we can do about how we came to be, how the world came into existence and so on. We have nothing to gain by worrying about whether the world is vivarta or a false appearance, nor do we have anything to lose by wondering whether it is an ābhāsa or a reflected image. No importance need be given to the two systems, Advaita and Śākta, being different.

Both take the same view about what we must do, the state we must ultimately aim at achieving and how we must exert ourselves for the same. Let those who have the courage to dismiss the world as Māyā do so. As for ourselves we are children. And like children playing with toy utensils, thinking them to be real, let us like children play with Mother. She herself will grant us what is to be granted at the appropriate time and bless us with final union with her.

I have mentioned a few basic points on which there is agreement between Advaita and the Śākta śāstras and a few points on which they differ. So much will do[2]. More would entail a great deal of philosophical inquiry, wrestling with ideas and opinions that are hypothetical in nature but may seem part of an established system. Our present concern is fixing our mind with love on Ambā, the Mother, who is the embodiment of beauty. That is the very purpose of my speaking to you about the *Saundaryalaharī*. While doing so, referring to certain philosophical matters could not be helped.

We must note some points in brief. In place of the basic quiescent Brahman in Advaita, the Śākta system has Śivam. According to Advaita Vedānta, the Parabrahman, though quiescent and without any function, is cinmaya, that is imbued with jñāna. In the Śākta doctrine, in place of cit we have Śakti who is not only imbued with jñānȧ but also (as is obvious) with Śakti. The Advaitik Brahman which is serene and quiescent is self-contained. In the Śākta system, the quiescent Śiva inheres Śakti or power or energy, and the jñāna and strength of this Śakti are manifested outwardly in her dualistic sport. In Advaita, as the very name suggests, the Brahman is the only reality. What appears as a second to it is caused by Māyā, but the Brahman has no connection with this Māyā. How Māyā came to be, what it is, is a riddle. "It is not necessary to inquire into the question", says Advaita. "What we want is the extinction of Māyā and achieving direct perception, realisation, of the One Truth". Advaita has for this purpose cut out the pạth of jñāna. In the Śākta system, the dualistic manifestation is attributed to the desire of Śiva who is conjoined with Śakti and it is all for the joy of sport. The power of Māyā is also an aspect of this doctrine. Such details are not necessary now.[3]

It is the Brahman itself that appears as the individual Self because of Māyā. Advaita exhorts us to dispel Māyā by pursuing the path of jñāna. The individual Self will then become the Parabrahman. Fundamentally, the individual Self and Śivam are one and the same; in mokṣa they will become one. This is accepted in the Śākta system, paticularly in the Śrīvidyā tantra. The Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Siddhānta-Śaiva [Śaiva-Siddhānta], Śrīkaṇṭha-Śaiva (Śivādvaita) and Kāśmīra Śaiva systems — all these, after starting from points of view fundamentally different from those of Advaita, come close to it, in the order they are mentioned, Kāśmīra Śaivism coming closest to Advaita. More than that it is in the Śākta system that the non-dualistic indentity of the individual Self and the Brahman is mentioned. The difference between the two systems is on the subject of creation [as mentioned earlier]. There are no differences of view between them on the question of liberation. Advaita treats Dvaita or dualism as the construction of Māyā and it is to be rejected outright. In the Śākta system it is the creation of Parāśakti who is the power of the Brahman. "All this dualistic manifestation is the sport of Parāsakti. Learn to look at it as such. Are you not also created by that Śakti, from that Śakti and of that Śakti? Without your knowing it, has she not herself made you think, through the power of Māyā, that you are different? Sever your ties with Māyā by praying to her and by adhering to sādhana according to the Śrīvidyā tantra. Transcending Māyā, become one with the Śakti that is the basis of all; and, finally, become united with that one tranquil Reality with which Śakti herself is united," so says the Śākta system.

Advaita and the Śākta doctrine — especially the Śrīvidyā trantra of the latter — are very close to each other. The Ācārya must have felt that those who found it difficult to follow the path of jñāna could take to the worship of Ambā according to Śrīvidyā. It must have been his belief that those who did so would advance from the point of looking upon the world as the dualistic creation of Śakti to the final stage of Advaita. In his hymns to Śiva, Viṣṇu and other deities there are no references to the doctrines pertaining to the Śivāgamas or to the Vaiṣṇava tantras. They are works composed in a spirit of devotion. If you go looking hard you may find one or two references to Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava doctrines. But in the *Saundaryalaharī* a considerable portion, that too of the first part, is entirely devoted to the Śākta system. Even if you hold the view that it is not the work of the Ācārya, consider the whole work together, including the second part which, it is agreed, is by the Ācārya. His purpose would then be clear to us: "If you cannot follow the path of

Both take the same view about what we must do, the state we must ultimately aim at achieving and how we must exert ourselves for the same. Let those who have the courage to dismiss the world as Māyā do so. As for ourselves we are children. And like children playing with toy utensils, thinking them to be real, let us like children play with Mother. She herself will grant us what is to be granted at the appropriate time and bless us with final union with her.

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Advaita, the next option for you is Śrīvidyā." Also in some hymns to Devī by the Ācārya the subject of Śrīvidyā is dealt with at length.

In this Maṭha [Kāñcī Kāmakoṭi] — indeed in all maṭhas established by the Ācārya — the worship of Īśvara is Vedic and not according to the Śaiva tantra; the worship of Ambā too is Vedic; but otherwise there are also rites according to the Śrīvidyā tantra.

Śrīvidyā integrates dualism and non-dualism and, in the final analysis, it is non-dualism. It says that the non-dualistic Śiva, who does not have a second, and Śakti, the creator of the dualistic world, are inseparable. In the "One Thousand Names of Lalitā", the name occurring before the last one is "Śiva-Śakti-aikya-rupiṇī".

Here, in the *Saundaryalaharī* [that is in its first part, "Ānandalaharī"] the first words of the very first stanza are "Śivaḥ Śaktyā yuktaḥ". The words come rather abruptly, as if prompted by someone. I will now conclude my introduction and take up the stanzas one by one[4].

Notes & References

[1] Anything that exists outside of oneself denotes Dvaita or dualism.

[2] Though the Great Guru says so here, later he speaks more on the subjects dealt with in this chapter.

[3] They are, however, explained later by the Mahāsvāmī.

[4] The Master has not explained the meaning of all the stanzas of the *Saundaryalaharī* in these discourses. Stanzas dealing with esoteric aspects of mantra yoga and those containing certain types of description have been omitted by him . The stanzas he has dealt with in detail are : 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 12, 15, 16, 17, 20, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 34, 35, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 56 (first two lines), 57, 63, 65, 66, 69, 75, 84, 95, 97, 99, 100. The 37 stanzas he has explained to same extent are : 5, 9, 10, 11, 14, 18, 21, 25, 26, 30, 31, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 45, 53, 54, 55, 60, 61, 62, 64, 70, 71, 73, 82, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 94, 96, 98. The eight stanzas he has briefly touched upon: 13, 52, 58, 59, 74, 83, 86, 93. The 13 stanzas he has totally omitted are : 19, 32, 33, 67, 68, 72, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 85.

Chapter 21

The Hymn to Śakti Starts with Śiva

Śivaḥ Śaktyā yukto yadi bhavati śaktaḥ prabhavitum
Na cedevam devo na khalu kuśalaḥ spanditumapi
Atastvām ārādhyām Hariharaviriñcadibhirapi
Praṇantum stotum va kathamakṛtapuṇyaḥ prabhavati.

Our hymn starts with this stanza. It states an important Śākta concept : that Ambā is a power higher than even Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra who perform the three functions, respectively, of creating all the worlds, sustaining them and destroying them. Śiva is indeed the Parabrabhman without any attributes and is still in his non-dualistic state. And he can stir and make the Trimurti (Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra) perform their dualistic cosmic functions only if she activates him.

"The Trimūrti and other powerful deities worship you. Even the Brahman you keep under your sway and urge to activity. From a housefly flapping its wings and an ant crawling, all activity and work in the world are attributed to your power, your resolve. That being the case, how can any individual prostrate himself before you or sing your praises by himself [that is without the power granted by you, Ambā]?

"My love and devotion for you, my prostrating myself before you, are these to be ascribed to my will, are they my doing, my resolve? I have just begun to compose this hymn to you. But can I do it without the energy imparted by you, without your grace and without your consent?"

The Ācārya asks Ambā thus, not explicitly, not in so many words, but subtly, merely hinting at what he wants to convey.

In the same oblique manner he says: "It is you who impart the power to sing your praises. But do you give such power to anybody and everybody? No. Even if you are our Mother, you grant your blessings according to the karma of each. So you will not grant the great good fortune of adoring you to the undeserving. How does one qualify to receive it? One must have earned merit in one's past lives by performing many good deeds : that is how one becomes deserving. No one else is qualified to pay you obeisance or to extol you."

The Ācārya does not say everything plainly. In fact many things are said in this, the very first stanza, indirectly. This is an important characteristic of poetry: unlike in prose everything must not be explained in a plain manner. Certain matters must be left unsaid or merely implied in what you say. Only then will one's interest be aroused, only then will there be aesthetic pleasure. The rasa or juice of a fruit does not drip outside but is contained in it. Similar is the case with poetry. A poem must be "rasavat", that is it must have hidden in it that which gives aesthetic enjoyment. It is also said that poetry must be "sāravat". It means it must have substance: all unwanted things must be discarded and the juice or essence alone extracted. This means there is no circumlocution or prolixity: whatever is said is said clearly and briefly. The juice extracted from a basketful of limes will be only so much as to fill a small jar. So in poetry the ideas must be presented in a condensed manner, in the form of "essence". A musician who takes up a small pallavi[1] for singing renders it expansively, with sangati upon sangati (variations of a melodic line). Similarly, a poem must be so composed that the connoisseur will himself discover its inner meaning and the beauty of its images and try to understand the ideas coveyed by it through his own interpretation.

There is one more point that emerges as the inner meaning of the last line of the stanza. "Praṇantum stotum va katham akṛtapuṇyaḥ prabhavati". "How can anyone who has not earned any merit pay you obeisance or adore you?" asks the Ācārya. But, since he himself sings Ambā's praises, does he think that he has earned much merit? To construe so would be wrong. In a later passage the Ācārya says, abasing himself, "Bestow upon *me too* your sidelong glance" and "Place your foot on my head also[2]." One who speaks thus will never boast in this manner: "I have done a little good, that is why I am able to sing your praises." So we have to ponder over the stanza and discover the inner meaning suggested by the words in it.

What did the Ācārya say at the beginning? "She (Ambā) activates Śiva, the quiescent Reality, that does not stir otherwise." Following the same logic it must be that the Ācārya felt thus when he composed the hymn: "I have not earned any merit but I have been given by Ambā the power to compose the hymn that is meant for those who have earned merit."

"How can anyone who has not earned any merit extol you?" If the Ācārya were to ask the same question, we can imagine his own answer to it. "You have the power to accomplish anything. You are capable of activating even the quiescent Śiva. It is this power of yours that has inspired my tongue, my speech, to sing your praises." To give such a construction would be after the Ācārya's own heart.

"Praṇantum" (to prostrate oneself): here it is a bodily function that is referred to. "Stotum" (to extol): what is meant here is a verbal function. Of the triad, "mano-vāk-kāyam" (mind-speech-body), the latter two are covered by "stotum" and "praṇantum". What about the first? It is only after thinking of Ambā, meditating on her, that one prostrates oneself before her and sings her praises. So the mind is also brought in in this way. This idea is implied in the stanza. Here we see that mind, speech and body are offered to Ambā. The seed sown in the first stanza of the hymn attains its final stage of the ripened fruit in the one-hundredth stanza. And the fruit signifies self-surrender to Ambā, the offering of oneself to her.

If one cannot pay obeisance to Ambā and adore her because one has not earned merit in one's previous births, it means that one cannot take the path of devotion. The Ācārya who has spoken thus with regard to the way of bhakti expresses a similar view with regard to the way of jñāna in his *Vivekacūḍāmani*[3]: "Muktirno śatakoṭi janmasu kṛtaiḥ puṇyairvinā labhyate." It means that liberation by following the path of jñāna cannot be obtained without having acquired merit in one hundred crores of lives.

An interesting point to be noted here is that in the *Saundaryalaharī*, which is a devotional work, the Ācārya does not explicitly state, at the beginning, that with divine grace alone is one persuaded to take the right path, whether it is that of bhakti or of jñāna. Now the world believes that God is "bundled up" in the path of jñāna and kept aside. But what does the Ācārya himself say in one of the early stanzas of his *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* which is a treatise on jñāna? It is with divine grace, he states, that one is born a mortal, desires liberation and comes by a high-souled guru[4]. "Daivānugraha hetukaṁ" are the words used in the context. Māṇikkavācakar[8] echoes the same view when he says that one is inspired by God to take the path of devotion.

The hymn starts with the words, "Śivaḥ Śaktyā", that is with the highly auspicious word "Śiva". The stanza says that Śiva will not be able even to stir if he is not with Śakti. But it must be noted that it starts with "Śiva" not with "Śakti". We usually use the term "sati-pati" (wife and husband), "Mrs and Mr"[5], that is first wife and then husband. The hymn is all about the glory of Śakti. It says that without Śakti Śiva has no greatness. If he remains alive even after swallowing the Kālakuṭa poison it is because of the power of her tāṭaṅkas (ear-ornaments). The hymn which goes so far in exalting Śakti mentions the name of Śiva first, at the very beginning, and then only the name of Devī (Śakti).

Why is it so? The Ācārya was always careful about reminding the world of the tenets of the dharmaśāstras. In many ways Īśvara and Ambā are different from the worldly husband and wife pair. A woman is customarily called "abalā" (one who is "weak"). It is the man who protects her. Bala and śakti mean the same. When you come to the divine pair, Śiva and Śakti, the very name of the wife is Śakti, that is Power. Without her Śiva has to remain doing nothing. When we want to tell someone, "Go and sit quietly in a corner," we say [in Tamil] *"Śivanena kiḍa"*. It reminds us of the jocular references to the contemporary scene made by those who give discourses on the Purāṇas. If a man sets out on some work, showing much energy and enthusiasm, we say he "starts out" with śakti. "Having no śakti, I remained like Śiva doing nothing." Such language comes naturally to us.

The dharmaśāstras, which point the way to how life is to be lived in this world, have it that the wife is subordinate to the husband. When we regard the divine pair, Īśvara and Ambā, it is the reverse: the former is the quiescent Brahman without any attributes while the latter is the great power (also known as Māyāśakti) and she is behind the conduct of the world.

It is not conceptually alone that Śiva is thought to be powerless and Śakti powerful. In the poetic tradition also, it is customary while portraying love or śṛṅgāra to give the heroine a place higher than that of the hero. When peace is restored between the two after an unfriendly spell, it is the hero who falls at the feet of the heroine — this is how poets see their relationship. We see the same in the *Gītagovindam*[6]. Kṛṣṇa requests Rādhā: "Please, in your large-heartedness, place your foot on my head as an ornament for it." Such sentiments are expressed in stories relating to Śiva and Pārvatī in poetical works as well as in the Purāṇas. In the *Saundaryalaharī* itself we see examples of the same in the latter part. "Pādyaṁ" is one of the rites of worship. We offer water to a guest : similarly, when we perform pūjā to a deity and make it rise in all its grace we pour water over its feet in the same way as we offer water to a guest to wash his feet. The water poured over the feet of a deity is pādyaṁ. The Ācārya says in a later stanza that the Gaṅgā in the matted hair of Śiva serves as pādyam for Ambā[7]. What does this mean? Does it not mean that Śiva's head rests at the feet of Ambā? Only then will the Gaṅgā in his matted locks become the water to wash her feet.

In another passage this idea [of Śiva's head being placed at the feet of Ambā] is expressed more explicitly. The poetic convention is that even when the hero (nāyaka) falls at the feet of the heroine (nāyakī), the latter is not remorseful and is not reconciled to her husband. What happens now is something that will cause a feeling of awkwardness in us. But we must remember that the poet tries to give an enhanced place to śṛṅgāra or the erotic rasa[8] in his poem. So... The hero falls at the feet of the heroine. But her anger — or pretended anger — is not assuaged or it does not seem to be assuaged. She kicks him on his head. Thereupon he rises, exclaiming in his anxiety, "Have you, dear, hurt your foot?" Only then is she appeased. Such is the divine resolve that the Ācārya's poem should have all the characteristics of poetry in full measure. So he too has portrayed the hero-heroine relationship (in this case the relationship between Śiva and Ambā) according to the poetic tradition[8].

As jagadguru, the Ācārya thought that it was his first duty to teach the world the code of conduct laid down in the dharmaśāstras. Next in order was to speak about devotion (through his hymns to various deities) according to the degree of maturity of people and then to teach philosophy, jñāna. Despite all this, as he composed this hymn, inspired by Ambā, he had to keep in mind both the Śākta concept and our poetic tradition. So we find him raising Ambā to a place higher than that of her husband Paramaśiva. He does the same according to our poetics in which the nāyakī is depicted as being superior to the nāyaka. However, the Ācārya must have felt thus: "All dharmaśāstras proclaim that the wife must remain loyal to her husband. If a woman is married to a stone, then she must respect that stone as her husband. In this hymn Ambā is depicted differently, as being higher than Śiva. As one occupying the seat of dharma I wonder what would happen if all women were to follow the example of Ambā." It is as a compensation for this that, at the very beginning of the hymn, the Ācārya mentions the name of Śiva first and that of Śakti after it. Although, later in the stanza itself, it is mentioned that Śiva's greatness lies in being together with Ambā, he starts the stanza with the word "Śiva" to convey the message to womankind that Ambā's greatness too lies in Śiva's name being given precedence over hers and in her being submissive to him.

There are stanzas appearing later in the hymn that clearly state that Ambā is the highest of the pativratas[8] and that her conduct is fully in accord with the dharmaśāstras. In Stanza 29 there is a description of Ambā seated on the throne in royal splendour as Rājarājeśvarī. The celestials prostrate themselves before her. But now, as she sees Īśvara appearing on the scene, she is all excitement and she rushes to receive him respectfully and affectionately. As she does so her attendants warn her that she might trip over the crowns of the celestials prostrating themselves before her. In another stanza (64) the Ācārya says that because of speaking tirelessly of the many qualities of her husband Ambā's tongue becomes red like a hibiscus flower. The story of the different ways in which Parameśvara sports is set to music and Sarasvatī plays it on her vīṇa (Stanza 66). Ambā delights in it, listening to it again and again. In another verse (82) the Ācārya observes that prostrating herself again and again before her husband her knees become stiff. In one of the last stanzas (96) the Ācārya raises her to great heights by calling her "satīnām acarame", meaning the first among pativratas.

The Ācārya was particular that he should not place before the community an ideal contrary to the tenets of the śāstras. That is why he begins his hymn to Ambā with the name of her husband coming first. "Mother and father" : in the Vedas themselves "Mātṛdevo" comes before "Pitṛdevo"[9]. Even so, since the Ācārya has often to speak of Ambā as being higher than Śiva, as if to compensate for this, he gives the name of Śiva at the very start of the hymn and before that of Śakti. The import of this stanza (1) is that Śiva's greatness depends on his being united with Śakti. But by the manner in which the words are used we have to construe that Ambā's own greatness is dependent on her being united with him--so first Śiva and then Śakti ("Śaktyā").

The primordial couple exalt each other: she exalts him and he exalts her. As a matter of fact the one is neither lower nor higher than the other. The two are indeed equal. "Anyonya sadṛśaṁ": Īśvara and Ambā are equal in their glory.

We use the word "samayaṁ" for religion. For example, "Hindu samayam", *Śamaṇa* (Śramaṇa) śamayaṁ, and so on. If the word is used as a common name for religion it must be traced to the idea of Śiva and Śakti being regarded as equal. In the Śākta and Śaiva concepts one of the ways of worship is called "samayācāra". It is adoration on a high plane with no external pūjā; a deity is meditated upon as residing in one's heart. Why the name "samayaṁ" for it? In it Ambā and Īśvara are to be meditated upon as being equal in five different ways. This kind of worship has the name of "pañca-samayaṁ". First, Śiva and Ambā are equal in their names: if he is Śiva, she is Śivā: if he is Haṁsa, she is Haṁsī; if he is Bhairava, she is Bhairavī; if he has the name of Samaya itself, then she is Samayī. Second, they are equal in their rūpa or form also. As Kāmeśvara and Kameśvarī their colour is red. Both have four hands and three eyes and the crescent moon in their hair; the two have the same weapons in their hands, bow and arrow, the noose and the goad. Third, they reside in the same places: on the Meru peak, at the centre of the Maṇidvīpa (Island of Jewels) in the ocean of amṛta or ambrosia, and on the Bindu of the Śrīcakra. Four, both perform the same function, what is called pañcakṛtya[10]. Five, the blessings received by the world from them are the same.

The idea of Śiva and Ambā being equal must be deeply etched in our minds. When we are asked to view all creatures in the world as equal, should we speak of some gods or goddesses as being lower or higher than some other gods or goddesses. It is especially wrong to make a distinction in status between a god and a goddess who form a couple or who are our Mother and Father. So at the back of our minds we must always have the awareness that the two are one indeed. However, there are occasions or reasons to look upon the one as being higher than the other. The mother matters to a child more than anyone else when it snuggles up to her and talks to her sweetly. At another time it may show its affection for its father in the same manner. The point to note is that on such occasions the mother or father, as the case may be, has the child's total attention which is possible only when it thinks that the one is higher than the other (or, in other words, that the one means more to it than the other). And only with such total and exclusive attention does love come welling up in its heart. Its behaviour in such a context will not be misunderstood by either of the parents. If the child loves its mother more than its father at a particular time, the latter will not mind being seen as "lower" than the mother. The same applies to the mother when the child appears to have more affection for the father. Looked at from the poetic angle, the divine Parents conduct their sport in such a way that the "poet child" finds delight in seeing the Mother to be higher than the Father (or the Father higher than the Mother). When a child regards the divine Parents in pursuance of a philosophical concept, in consonance with its attitude, the Mother may appear to be higher than the Father or, it may be, the Father will appear to be higher than the Mother.

The *Saundaryalaharī* is as much a treatise on the Śākta system as it is a devotional work. But, on the whole, it is a glorification of Ambā. Since our Jagadācārya (Ādi Śaṅkara) was anxious that this should not lead to people taking a view contrary to what is laid down in the dharmaśāstras with regard to the husband-and-wife relationship, he has "corrected" the importance otherwise given to Ambā by showing Īśvara in some places to be "higher" than she is. This is how he mentions the name of Śiva at the very beginning of the hymn, then that of Śakti following it.

Notes & References

[1] "Pallavi" : See "Notes & References", Chapter 12.

[2] *Saundaryalaharī,* Stanzas 57, 84.

[3] Jantūnām narajanma durlabham ataḥ puṁstvam tato vipratā
Tasmād vaidika-dharmamārgaparatā vidvatvam asmātparam
Ātmānātmavivecanam svanubhavo brahmātmanā saṁsthitiḥ
Muktirno śatakoṭi janmasu kṛtaiḥ punyairvinā labhyate
— *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, 2.*

[4] Durlabham trayamevaitat daivānugrahahetukam
Manuṣyatvam mumukṣutvam mahāpuruṣasaṁśrayaḥ
— Ibid, 3.

[5] The English convention is "Mr and Mrs So and So."

[6] Smaragaralakhandanam mama śirasi maṇḍanam dehi padapallavamudāram
Jvalati mayidāruno Madanakadanānalo haratu tadupāhita vikāram
— *Gitagovindam, 19.7*

[7] *Saundaryalaharī*, 84.

[8] *Saundaryalaharī*, 85, 86.

[9] "Mātṛdevo bhava, pitṛdevo bhava......."
— *Taittirīya Upaniṣad, 11.2*

[10] Pañcakṛtya : the five functions of creation, sustenance, dissolution, veiling, granting blessings. The subject is dealt with in a subsequent chapter.

Chapter 22

Imparting Life-force to Śiva

Masculine and Feminine Names

It would be interesting to note that, though Śiva's importance is shown by his name appearing as the first word in the hymn, devotees of Ambā see her greatness reflected in her very name. They observe: "Śakti is joined to Śiva. And here, (in the first stanza), they are together as seen from the fact that the word 'Śaktyā' is linked to the name first mentioned, 'Śiva'. But this is not the only point to be noted. There is Śakti joined to the very first syllable 'Śi' in the name of Śiva. It is only because of this that the name of Śiva is a living reality." [Śakti is the life-breath of the name of Śiva.]

How? I will tell you something perhaps you do not know. There is the vowel "i" in the very first syllable "Śi" of "Śiva". "Śi" is formed by the vowel "i" added to the consonant "Ś". This "i" or "ī" is itself the name of Ambā. The general rule is that consonants are Śiva letters and vowels Śakti letters. Moreover, among vowels "i" and "ī" personify Ambā. Just as the quiescent Brahman has the name of Praṇava, so too Śiva-Śakti — that is Śiva, the functionless Brahman, conjoined to Śakti, the functioning Brahman — has also a Praṇava. In it Śakti is the letter "i". There is the support of the Vedas themselves for the view that "i-kāra" ("or ī-kāra") is Ambā. In the Vedic "Śrīsūktam" Ambā in the form of Lakṣmī in the heart-lotus is called Padminī and it is said, "I go for refuge to her who is 'ī-kāra'." Is not the very word "Śrī" "ī-kāra"?

The majority of masculine names end in "a-kāra" like "Śaṅkara", "Nārāyaṇa", "Rāma", "Kṛṣṇa", "Subrahmaṇya" and "Gaṇeśa". In Sanskrit visarga [spirant] is added to the names. Thus we have "Śaṅkaraḥ", "Nārāyaṇaḥ", and so on. In Tamiḷ [and in Malayālaṁ] these names are pronounced as "Śaṅkaran", "Nārāyaṇaṇ", and so on. Hindi-speaking people say "Śaṅkar", "Nārāyaṇ," and so on. In Tamiḷ Nādu also this style is becoming increasingly popular.

The majority of feminine names end in "ī": "Śaṅkarī", "Nārāyaṇī", "Lakṣmī", "Sarasvatī", "Pārvatī", "Kāmākṣī", "Mīnākṣī", "Viśālākṣī". For the names of the Śaktis or consorts of male deities we change a-ending names to ī-ending ones: "Śaṅkara-Śaṅkarī", "Īśvara-Īśvarī", "Narasimha-Nārasimhī". But there is something special about "Nārāyaṇī" and "Vaiṣṇavī". They are not the names of the consort of Viṣṇu but the names of Ambā, his sister. Such is the closeness between Viṣṇu and Ambā. In this context it is further interesting to note that the two names, "Hara and Hari", are not similar to "Śaṅkara and Śaṅkarī". Hari is not the name of Ambā but of Viṣṇu. "Deva-Devī", "sahodara-sahodarī", "putra-putrī" : the a-ending masculine names or nouns become ī-ending feminine names or nouns. In the feminine names of people in Europe [or Christian feminine names even in India] there are many that end in "i" or "ī" [that is phonetically] "Mary", "Lucy", "Annie", "Julie" and so on. In our own country masculine a-ending names (they are Sanskritic) have different endings in different parts: "Śaṅkaran" and "Nārāyaṇan" in one part; "Śaṅkar" and "Nārāyaṇ" in another and "Śaṅkaruḍu" and "Nārāyaṇuḍu" in a third. But when it comes to feminine names ending in "ī", there is no such change. "Kāmākṣī" is "Kāmākṣī" in all parts, so too "Mīnākṣī" and other "ī-ending" feminine names.

Like "Śaṅkara-Śaṅkarī" and "Īśvara-Īśvarī", we do not say "Rudra-Rudrī". The feminine gender of "Rudra" is "Rudrāṇī". Similarly "Śivānī" for "Śiva", "Bhavānī" for "Bhava", "Indrāṇī" for "Indra" and "Brāhmaṇī" for "Brahmā". Here too we find that the names in the feminine gender end in "ī".

The feminine gender of "Śiva" is not only "Śivānī". "Śivā" also means Śiva's wife. Likewise, we have "Rāma-Ramā", "Kṛṣṇa-Kṛṣṇā". It means that masculine names ending in "a" end in the feminine gender either in "ī" or "ā". Though the feminine gender of Rāma is Ramā, that of "Abhirāma" is "Abhirāmī".

Apart from those ending in "i" and "ī", there are many feminine names ending in "ā" like Umā, Ramā, Durgā, Bālā, Lalitā and Śāradā.

If we see the names of Ambā in the *Amarakośam* we will note that they end either in ī or in ā.

Umā Kātyāyanī Gaurī Kālī Haimavatīsvarī
Śivā Bhavānī Rudrāṇī Śarvaṇī Sarvamaṅgalā
Aparṇā Pārvatī Durgā Mṛḍanī Caṇḍikāmbikā
Āryā Dākṣāyaṇī caiva Girijā Menakātmajā
Karmamoṭī tu Cāmuṇḍā Carmamuṇḍā tu carcikā

Let us see the names of Lakṣmī given in the same work.

Lakṣmīḥ Padmālayā Padmā Kamalā Śrīrharipriyā
Indirā Lokamatā Mā Kṣīrodatanayā Ramā
Bhārgavī Lokajananī Kṣīrasāgarakanyakā

[Most of] the names of Sarasvatī also end in "ā" or "ī"

Brāhmī tu Bhāratī Bhāṣā Gīr Vāk Vāṇī Sarasvatī

The root of "Vāk" is "vāc". Only this name ends in a consonant, but it is a rare case. By and large feminine names end either in "ī" or in "ā".

In Tamiḷ also the feminine gender is indicated by the i-ending: *"Araśan-araśi"*(king-queen), *"aṇṇan-aṇṇi"*(elder brother-sister-in-law). But in this language there are no feminine names ending in "ā'. The "ā" becomes "ai" — "Sītā - Sītai", "Lalitā-Lalitai". In Sanskrit there are no words at all ending in "ai", though it occurs in mantra śāstra in the context of Ambā being referred to as "Vāgdevī".

Words ending in "ā" are exclusively feminine. There are no masculine names ending in ā.

In other countries too there are many examples of feminine names ending in "ā": "Diānā", "Juliānā", "Fatīmā", "Khadījā". Masculine and feminine names of white people end in different ways. But in their case too the feminine forms of masculine names end in "ā": "Alexander-Alexandrā", "Victor-Victoriā". While there are no masculine names at all in India ending in "ā" there are a few in the West or among Judaeo-Christian people like "Joshuā", "Geremiā", ending in that vowel.

There are a number of masculine names too ending in "i": "Hari", "Gaṇapati", "Rāmamūrti" and so on. But there are only feminine names ending in "ā". If you see the book on declension and conjugation you will find that, after the a-ending "Rāma", it is the i-ending "Hari". There are no feminine names at all ending in "a". The very first in the book ends in "ā"—"Ramā". Then you have the word "mati" ending in "i", followed by "Gaurī" ending in "ī".

In Tamiḷ "Lakṣmī", "Sarasvatī", "Pārvatī" and so on are written with a short "i"— "Lakṣmi", "Sarasvati", "Pārvati". The majority of names ending in "ī" are feminine. Masculine names ending in "ī" are fewer than those ending in "i". Examples of those ending in "ī" are "senānī", "grāmaṇī" (village head) and "sūtī" (a knowledgeable person).

In the *Viṣṇu-Sahasranāmam* (The One Thousand Names of Viṣṇu) you see names like "Brahmā", "Dhātā", "Tvastā" and "Ātmā" apparently ending in "ā" "He [the Mahāsvāmī] says that there are no masculine names ending in 'ā'. But what about these names?" people may ask. However, all those words apparently ending in "ā" have stems that are different. The stem of "Brahmā" is "Brahman", of "Ātmā" "Ātman", of "Dhātā" and "Tvastā" "Dhātṛ" and "Tvaṣṭṛ" respectively.

The stem of "pitā" is "pitṛ", of "mātā" "matṛ". "Śarmā", "Varmā" and "Gupta" represent the Brahmin, Kṣatriya and Vaiśya castes. The stems of the first two words are "Śarman" and "Varman". "Gupta" ends in a short "a". "Sakhā" (friend), masculine gender, does not end in "ā" in its stem form; interestingly enough its stem is "śakhi", "i"-ending.

Men are usually taller than women. However, in the matter of names, feminine ones end in a long "ā", while masculine ones end in a short "a". Here we see women are elevated above men.

As mentioned before, feminine names ending in "i" or "ī" predominate. The name "Śakti" itself ends in "i", while "Devī" and "Īśvarī" end in "ī"; "Ambā" and "Ambikā" end in a long "ā".

Names ending in "ā" are exclusively those of women. However "i-kāra" and "ī-kāra" are said to personify Śakti. The mystery of this is known to people learned in mantras. It is to be cherished as a secret and imparted only to the deserving, those entitled to know it. To put it briefly, "ī" it is that imbues each and everyone with life (and gives them the light of knowledge.)

I began by telling you that in the very first syllable "Śi" of Śiva, Ambā is inseparably conjoined to the name as "i-kāra" breathing life into the god so named.

What will happen if the "i" in "Śiva" is dropped? As a masculine name if this "i" in it were changed to a-kāra, what would be the result? "Śiva", the most auspicious of names, would become "śava", denoting the most inauspicious. "Śi" minus "i" is "ś(a)". Does not "Śiva" then become "śava" (corpse)? It is the vowel "i" that imparts life to Īśvara. So if it is dropped?

In this context I have made another discovery. In the name "Īśvara", "ī" is the initial letter. In Vedānta, Īśvara denotes the Brahman with attributes, the functioning Brahman. All functions, all activity, originate from "ī", the bīja representing Śakti. Bīja means seed and just as an entire tree is potentially present or hidden in a small seed, a bīja or a bījākṣara encapsulates the power of a great mantra.

Let us view the concept that Śiva is śava if not united with Śakti, in the light of the Tamiḷ tradition in which sounds or phonemes have beautiful names. In the Praṇava of Śiva-Śakti there is "i". I said this letter stood for Ambā. I also observed that "i" in the Tamiḷ language is a letter with life (vowel); joined to it is the phonetic or sonic form of Īśvara which is a "corporal" letter (consonant). So in the Praṇava of Śiva-Śakti Śiva is the body (consonant) and Ambā is the life (vowel). What is Śiva minus "i"? We have already seen the answer, haven't we?

What do we mean when we say that Śiva is śava without Śakti? Without the mistress of the household the husband cannot do anything; he is powerless. Earlier I referred to certain colloquial usages in Tamiḷ. For example, "If you have the śakti for it, go and do it. Or else keep quiet like Śiva." Does it not mean that without "her", he has nothing to do, he can do nothing? Whoever it be, if he loses his śakti (energy) he will be incapable of doing anything. To the Brahman that is Śiva also it is the same if not conjoined with Śakti.

It is because the Brahman is aware of its śakti that it performs—and is able to perform—the function of creation with it. Is it not Śakti herself who makes it aware that it has śakti? This is what is said in the first stanza of the hymn: "Śiva becomes capable of performing his cosmic function only when he is united with you who is Śakti. Otherwise he will not be able to stir even." This idea is affirmed by adding the words, "Na khalu" (Is it not so?).

Śivaḥ Śaktyā yukto yadi bhavati śaktaḥ prabhavitum
Na cedevam devo na khalu kuśalaḥ spanditumapi

"Spanditum api" (even to stir or move);"kuśalaḥ na khalu" (not able,is it not so?"). Without Śakti, Śiva has to remain śava.

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Chapter 23

Ācārya for Both Paths

"There must be no cosmos; the phenomenal or empirical world is Māyā. One must become the Truth that is Śivam, the Brahman that is quiescent and without attributes." Such is the doctrine that the Ācārya has established and taught through his various commentaries and original works. What was important to him, his goal, was the unconditioned, quiescent Brahman. The idea of the Śakti that activates this Brahman he attacked bitterly and refuted it as Māyā. However, in this hymn, he extols the same Śakti thus: "Without you how can Śiva exercise his power?" He takes delight in the fact that Śakti energises Śiva and thereby the affairs of the world are conducted. "It is all your work, Mother," he exclaims.

"Can the same person speak thus in two different ways? Which of the two is the truth? Is the one the truth and the other untruth? Should the Ācārya have spoken in two different ways, in two different voices?

Both ways in fact represent the Truth.

"How can it be so? How can two statements that are diametrically opposed to each other be true — both of them?"

Logically both cannot be the Truth. However, the attributes of Truth are always not logically determined. Whatever is dear to you and also good for you must be treated as the truth. The Ācārya divides people into two categories: those capable of taking the path of jñāna and those taking the path of devotion. The former he instructs in the way suited to them by writing works on Advaita. And for the latter he has composed hymns like the *Saundaryalaharī* to help them bring about their spiritual betterment. He exhorts such as those who are in a mature stage and who make efforts to see the One Entity that is the root of all to reject the universe divided as it is multifariously. He also exhorts them to reject the body, senses and the mind that experience sorrow and happiness from the same and teaches them how to become absorbed in the quiescent Root of all. This is the path of jñāna.

There are people who cannot all at once do away with worldly matters and are not mature enough to reach the state of jñāna. The Ācārya shows them the path of devotion and he does so regarding it as a way for them to become mature. He is anxious that, since they cannot in their present state give up their worldly outlook and their involvement in the affairs of the senses and the mind, they should not for that reason be forgetful of the Root, the Reality, and make their life futile by becoming trapped in sensual pleasures, sorrow and fear. He shows them that all worldly affairs, worldly phenomena, are ruled by that serene Root, manifested as Īśvara conjoined with Śakti. He further teaches them to view all these as Īśvara's sport and exhorts them to involve their minds, senses, etc, in meditating upon him, in worshipping him, in listening to narrations of his doings and in singing his glory. If, in this manner, the functioning Brahman (Īśvara) is grasped through the very phenomenal world of the mind and the senses, one would become fit by the Lord's grace, by forsaking these very things [the phenomenal world, the mind and the senses], to reach the stage of the causative functionless Brahman.

When a thin, skinny child throws up tantrums and refuses to eat, what does its mother do? She speaks kindly to it, tells it stories, takes it to the backyard to show it the crow perched on the branch of a tree, and feeds it dainty morsels of food. The mother, let us suppose, has one more child which suffers from indigestion. She speaks even more lovingly to it and feeds it with gruel which is good for it. Would you say the mother treats her two children differently, that she is not truthful in what she does?

We have, on the one hand, Īśvara who creates the phenomenal world and all creatures and keeps them under his sway and, on the other, we have the individual (the individual Self) with a mind and senses: that there are thus two entities is a truth. When we inquire into the question of who or what the primary cause of all this is or what the root of all this is we find that it is all the sport, the Māyā (the jugglery), of an entity that is by itself, and at the same time doing nothing. And this is also a truth.

Whatever the path followed by people, they must become sincerely involved in it. When they have not developed the required maturity for this, they must not be distracted from it and lose their one-pointedness.

It is not enough to say that the Ācārya teaches people in two different ways according to their different mental dispositions. The two different ways in which he imparts his teaching must be regarded as representing the Truth in two different stages of mind. It is for this reason that when one system is extolled, it may become necessary to do so at the expense of another. So, instead of subjecting the different ways or systems to criticism based on logic, they must be approached on the basis of psychology which does not come under logic, taking into account the differences in outlook of people and their fitness for, or entitlemeht to, a particular system. So when a way is to be shown for the inner advancement of an individual it may become necessary to show one system as being higher than another — this fact must be appreciated.

When a mother administers a bitter medicine to her thin and skinny child, telling it that it tastes sweet, is she speaking a lie? No, she is telling the truth. Another child suffering from diarrhoea wants to eat a *Mysore pak*[1] but its mother tells it that it is an *arappukaṭṭi*[2] and stops it from eating it. Is she not now also telling the truth? What is truth? The criterion in judging whether or not something is a truth is that it must be good for others. But what is beneficial to some must not be harmful to some others. Which means that what we consider truthful must not do harm to anybody. Also one's own selfish interest, and one's personal gain, must have no place in it. People for whose well-being a system is being expounded must accept it as something that they like; they must also be able to follow it without difficulty.

It is with this intention—with this good intention—that one system is elevated and another lowered in relation to it. The purpose is not to show that the latter is in fact worthless. The real idea behind elevating a system over another is that the individual who receives instruction in it will appreciate that it is the one that is meant for him. When he finds that it is the one best suited to him he will follow it with interest, solely concentrating on it.

Also the purpose of showing another system in a poor light is to dissuade him from plunging into it and thereby becoming confused. For an individual with a different outlook, and belonging to a different culture, it may be necessary to speak depreciatingly of what is exalted in the case of the first one and what is rejected in the case of the latter may have to be presented as the best in the case of the first individual. We see the same with regard to the Purāṇas and devotional works. While dealing with a particular god, he is depicted as being superior to all other gods[3].

It is in keeping with this logic that the Ācārya asks you to hold in devotion the very thing he asks you to reject as an Advaitin. What he condemns while he speaks on Advaita as Māyā is for those who do not have to be devout, those for whom it is not necessary to follow the path of bhakti. If a man wants to be a devotee he has necessarily to feel that he is separate, even if it be to the smallest degree, from the object of his adoration, that is God. In Advaita jñāna there is no such separation, not even to the least degree, and there is only oneness. And those who are capable of following this path have no need to be devoted in the manner or sense we think. In their case the Ācārya says that contemplation of one's true being or nature is bhakti—"svasvarūpānusandhānam"[4]. But there are very, very few who are capable of such bhakti.

How about us, the majority of us? We go along the way our mind takes us and the way our senses drag us, without making any distinction between right and wrong and indeed committing wrongs thinking that what keeps us happy must be right. We will learn to be humble and devout and to be without fear and we will be less prone to do wrongs, or commit sins, if we are taught that there is a Śakti that governs even deities like Brahmā, that this Parāśakti can even move the Brahman. "The quiescent Śivam, without any function, is the Truth. As far as it is concerned, there is neither right nor wrong, neither anything just nor anything unjust, neither is there merit nor demerit. All that we see is Māyā. That Truth (Śivam) is not connected with anything [being Absolute]. It neither punishes nor blesses."

If we speak thus in a non-dualistic manner, we may take a perverse view of it and act according to the dictates of our mind, as if we had the freedom and licence to do anything we like. That is why at the very commencement of the hymn the Ācārya teaches us to erase our ego-sense: he proclaims that there is Ambā, the Great Power, to activate Śivam (the unconditioned Brahman), Ambā, who is worshipped by the Trinity--Viṣṇu, Rudra and Brahmā. The Ācārya says : "Hariharaviriñjādibhirapi ārādhyām". We do not have the energy even to think that we can prostrate ourselves before her or sing her praises. Even to pray to her, to sing her glory, we must be the recipients of her grace. For that we must live in accordance with dharma; we must be just and devout—such a meaning is implied in the first verse.

Notes & References

[1] A South Indian sweet resembling the Northern *barfi*.

[2] *Arappukaṭṭi* : oil-cake got after extracting oil from margosa seeds; it tastes bitter.

[3] See Chapter 9, Part Fourteen, *Hindu Dharma*.

[4] Mokṣakāraṇasāmāgryāṁ bhaktireva garīyasī
Svasvarūpānusandhānaṁ bhaktirityabhidhīyate
— *Vivekacuḍāmaṇi*, 32.

Chapter 24

Pañcakṛtya—and Kāmeśvarī and Kāmeśvara

"Hari-Hara-Viriñca": these are the names given by the Ācārya for the gods who constitute the Trimūrti. And these three, he says, worship Ambā. Before this he observes: "Even Śiva can stir — that is he is able to conduct the affairs of the universe — only when he is united with you." So does it not mean that the "Hara" of the Trimūrti is one and the "Śiva" mentioned at first (in the very first stanza) is another?

Leave aside the concept that all is one. The non-dualistic dotrine has no place here. Is that not how the hymn has come to be composed? In the state in which all are one inwardly and are separate outwardly, Hara and Śiva are different.

"Hara" means "one who destroys", "one who annihilates". It occurs in the compound words "apaharaṇa" and "saṁharaṇa". It takes the form of "hāra" — "apahāra" and "saṁhāra". Brahmā creates, Viṣṇu sustains, Rudra destroys. "Hara" means "Rudra" the destroyer.

It is the one and only Paramātman that divides Itself into three deities to perform three different functions. Their power to perform these functions is derived from the root Śakti of the Paramātman. That root Śakti is Ambā. She is the power of the Parabrahman that is called the Paramātman. "It is not only the three Mūrtis (the Trimūrti) who derive energy from you but all living beings, including flies and ants. She is also the power latent in all inanimate objects."

The Śakti of the Parabrahman must be the Parabrahman Itself. A thing is a thing by virtue of its power. If it loses its power it becomes useless. When you say that a motor-car has a ten-horsepower engine, what do you mean? It is the horsepower that makes a car a car. If that power is exhausted, it is only a car in name. Will it be able to perform the function expected of a motor-car? If you put your hand inside the bonnet and fumble with the engine nothing will happen to you — you will not receive a shock. An individual remains an individual because of his śakti. Therefore what is called "Parabrahma-Sakti" is the Parabrahman Itself. However, anyone, whoever it be, can also remain doing nothing, without showing his śakti, his power or strength. "Śivam" is to be understood in this manner, the Parabrahman being by Itself in quietude, whithout any outward movement.

It is from this state of Śivam that we have emerged as individual beings with our mind turned to outward activities and our senses involved in outward objects. When do we realise our true state? When do we become freed from the ties of Māyā and the bondage of worldly existence? The answer is when we become inseparably dissolved in Śivam. Since the liberation that gives us beatitude of the highest order is a state of tranquillity, the Brahman in which we are inseparably dissolved must also be quiescent and serene and not manifesting its Śakti (power). That is why when we speak of the Brahman or the Parabrahman we refer to an entity that does not "work" or is not active. Don't we speak of a madman with a vacant look sitting in a corner doing nothing thus, "It is like the Brahman" [note the neuter gender used for the man].

Looked at in this manner there is reason to speak separately of the two : that Śiva is the Parabrahman and that Ambā is Parabrahma-Śakti, even though the one does not exist without the other.

Now, apart from the three functions [creation, sustenance and destruction] carried out through Brahma-Śakti, there are two more to be added. From the state of the serene Śivam how have we been brought to the condition in which we have no awareness of the true original form of ours? It is through Brahma-Śakti that it has been done. She it is who has concealed our awareness of our true form and created nescience in us as individuals and pushed us into the Māyā realm of worldly existence. Many great men have escaped or been freed from the snare of Māyā. They have attained their true form of awareness of the quiescent Śivam, becoming absorbed in the eternal tranquil state of mokṣa. From this we understand that Parāśakti—Brahma-Śakti — performs the function of granting us liberation through her grace. Thus two more functions are added to those of creation, sustenance and destruction. Of the two, the first is to conceal from us our awareness of our true Self with the power of Māyā. The second, to free us from the trap of Māyā and bless us with liberation, that is unite us with the Paramātman.

This reminds us of the words spoken by Māṇikkavācakar[g]: "*Śivamākki enaiyāṇḍa.*[1]" The two functions mentioned above are called "tirodhāna" and "anugraha". The first is also called "tirobhāva". The root "tiras" means "to conceal", to veil, "to make a secret of". You must have heard of the art called "tiraskariṇī" in which objects are concealed or made to disappear. The Tamiḷ word *"tirai"* is derived from "tiras". Is not an object concealed from us when the *tirai* or curtain falls? It is the work of Parāśakti to veil our real Self with the curtain of Māyā and consign us to worldly existence : this is called "tirodhāna". The function of raising the curtain and granting final release is anugraha. Just as Parāśakti has appointed Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra for creation, protection and dissolution, she has appointed Īśvara, who is also called Maheśvara, for tirodhāna. The first three functions come within the sphere of Māyā. The entire conduct of the world of Māyā is in the hands of Īśvara. Dispelling Māyā and granting the anugraha of liberation is the function of Sadāśiva[2].

The five functions are called "pañcakṛtya". They form part of Śaiva systems like Śaiva-Siddhānta also. In Tamiḷ the functions are called *"ākkal"* (creation), *alittal* or *kappu* (protection), *azhittal* (destruction), *"maraittal"* (concealment or veiling) and *arulal* (granting the grace of liberation). In Śaivism pañcakṛtya is performed by Paramaśiva. The dance of Naṭarāja is called "pañcakṛtya-paramānanda-tāṇḍava"[3]. In the Śākta discipline, pañcakṛtya is the work of Ambā. In the "One Thousand Names of Lalitā" she is called "Pañcakṛtya-parāyaṇā".

Ambā, as the "chief authority", appoints other "authorities" under her to perform the pañcakṛtya. It is not only because our subject is a Śākta hymn that we should think so. Even viewed impartially we will realise the appropriateness of Ambā being the chief authority for the five functions. Why do we say so? A "kṛtya" or "kārya" — something that is to be done or carried out — necessarily means the use of Śakti. Is not Śakti Ambā? In the Śaiva doctrine also it is mentioned that Śiva is with Śakti. That is Śiva's wife is called Śakti and he is together with her. In Kāśmīra Śaivism, which is very close to the non-dualistic system and to the ideas expressed in the *Saundaryalaharī,* the Paramātman occupying the highest plane is referred to as "Śiva-Śakti". So when it comes to pañcakṛtya it is fitting that it is brought under Ambā, that is Parāśakti. And pañcakṛtya is not the same as speaking of the concept of experiencing the inner quietude of samādhi.

If Ambā performs the functions of pañcakṛtya through five different deities, it means that she is higher than they are. Have not these five powers sprung from the power that is full of the Parabrahman? It follows that it must be higher than everything else.

That Root of this power is the subject of our hymn, Sundarī. She is the power that is the basis of all happenings, all action. She is the mistress of all the five deities. She is indeed higher than Sadāśiva who grants liberation. When he is in the form of jñāna, he is, as they say, "just Being"—he is being, not doing. When he is by himself he has nothing above or below him. But when he is engaged in performing a function — when he performs the function of granting jñāna — the power that makes him do so must be higher than what he is.

To those accomplished in mantra śāstra, siddhas, and to realised devotees she has given *darshan* in her gross form [that is in her physical form], seated above the five deities [those who perform the five functions]. She appears as Rājarājeśvarī in royal splendour. And what is her seat? Its four legs are Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra and Maheśvara. The seat proper which connects the four legs is Sadāśiva,

Ambā who has for her seat Brahmā and others who perform pañcakṛtya, Ambā that is absolute Brahma-Śakti, is known as Kāmeśvarī. In this form of hers, the Parabrahman, her consort, is called Kāmeśvara.

"When she is responsible for all functions, all cosmic activities, why should there be a husband for her, an entity called Kāmeśvara?"

Although she is all and everything, when she is Śrīvidyā — among the various forms of hers — her chief aspect is that of Mother. Like a child clinging to its mother in affection, all of us have to love her with devotion. And though she is Mahāśakti she assumes a form in which what is manifested is her beauty and loveliness rather than her power. That is why we see that her very first name in "The One Thousand Names of Lalitā" is "Śrīmātā". She creates us, protects us and, in between births, gives us a rest by destroying us. She sports with the veil of Māyā and, finally, the Mother that she is, she makes us one with her by granting us liberation. When she plays the part of Mother, there must perforce be a Father on the scene. Mother without Father... Can we think of the World Mother in two different ways? She is the young maiden goddess Bālā and Kanyākumārī — but that is a different matter. So also is the case of Durgā who appeared to subdue the demonic powers. Ambā [of whom we are speaking here] is primarily Mother, Śrīmātā. So there must be a Father to go with her. That is why we have Kāmeśvara as husband [for Kāmeśvarī] and that is why again, in keeping with worldly dharma, he is accorded a very high place. The *Lalitā-Triśatī* mentions fifteen names of the goddess as the wife of Kāmeśvara.

Though she is known by the names of Rājarājeśvarī, Lalitā, Tripurasundarī and so on, her name of Kāmeśvarī is of special importance. Just as in Śaivism Śiva is mentioned as being with Śakti, so in the Śākta system — and in the Śrīvidyā tantra — she, that is Śakti, is referred to as being with her husband Śiva. Who can be the husband of Brahma-Śakti that is full and undivided? When there exists nothing other than Brahma-Śakti who can be her husband? When you give some thought to the question you will realise that Śiva alone can be her husband, Śiva who does not manifest his power, Śiva who is the quiescent and serene Brahman, Śiva who appears to be different from that Śakti. This means that the power of the quiescent Śiva is manifested through his wife who is responsible for the pañcakṛtya. It also emerges that Śiva here, though he does not reveal the splendour of his power directly and does not perform any function, desires to reveal his power (or perform functions).

The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*[4] says: "The One Brahman desires to become many." If the quiescent Brahman becomes the active Brahman, it means that it must have had the desire to be that, the functioning Brahman — is that not so? "Desired" — "akāmayata" — is the word used in the Upaniṣad itself. The Brahman or Śivam in which the power of jñāna is always inherent wants to manifest its power — Brahma-Śiva-Śakti — and conduct the sport of the affairs of the world. This is called "icchāśakti", the power of desire. Then what actually performs the sport of pañcakṛtya is "kriyāśakti". Let that be. Our present concern is that when the Brahman, which is by Itself, turns outward it is desire that occurs to it first. The Upaniṣad calls it "kāma". The word does not yield any unsavoury meaning. It means here pure desire [desire that has nothing to do with carnal urges]. Kāma first arose from the Brahman, from Brahma-Śakti that is full and entire, and it is the first to arise from it as something different from it. It is the same Kāma that takes the place of his wife. The cosmic sport is the result of the quiescent Brahman, that is Śiva, uniting with icchāśakti, like father and mother uniting to give rise to prajā, offspring, and the pañcakṛtya is also a result of it. So the two become husband and wife. It is because Āmba is the personification of his desire or kāma that she becomes Kāmeśvarī.

That [Kāmeśvarī] is the first name. Since the first evolute of the Parabrahman is kāma, the one named after it, Kāmeśvarī, must be the prime name of the Brahma-Śakti. He who had desire is Kāmeśvara. He who was Parabrahman alone did no more than manifest his desire. The one who translates that desire into action and conducts the cosmic sport of pañcakṛtya is entirely Śakti. She, that is Kāmeśvarī, is like Victoria and Elizabeth, with sovereign authority. Śakti is the one who rules over all the worlds, all creatures and the celestials. The wife of a reigning king cannot be a queen in the real sense. A queen is one who rules in her own right. In the "One Thousand Ṇames of Lalitā", the very first name of "Śrīmātā" (what we affectionately call "Mother") is followed by two names which show that the goddess is the universal monarch, the queen-empress, holding authority over all the worlds. The two names: "Śrī Mahārājñī" and "Śrīmat Simhāsaneśvarī".

Being seated on the throne, on the simhāsana, is one aspect of Ambā. But, then, all kings and queens sit on their thrones. What is noteworthy with regard to Ambā is that, as I have already told you, she has a special throne, the "Pañcabrahmāsana". I further mentioned that she is seated on it as Kāmeśvari, that she is not alone on it and is with Kameśvara. She is in fact seated on his lap, on the lap of Kāmeśvara, on the Pañcabrahmāsana. So he too becomes her seat.

Kāma was the first to emerge from the Parabrahman necessarily for the cosmic sport. So Kāmeśvara and Kāmeśvarī are the names first given to the primordial couple.

Though she is called Lalitāmbā, he is not correspondingly called Laliteśvara. Lalitā means tender, delicate, soft. Only she, being feminine, can be so, not he. Similarly, though she is called "Rājarājeśvarī" he is not called "Rājarājeśvara". There is "Rājarājesvaram" in Tañjāvūr, but the name is derived from the king (Rājarāja Cola) who built the temple in Tañjāvūr. The temple itself is named "Bṛhadīśvaraṁ" after the name of its deity. There is no Rājarājeśvara to pair with Rājarājeśvarī because she alone has the authority to rule—she is the real Mahārājñī. The husband of the mahārājñī is like Albert, the consort of Queen Victoria, or Philip, the consort of Queen Elizabeth II. But this comparison is not exact. Queen Victoria was subject to Parliament as is the present Queen Elizabeth. Rājarājeśvarī is a completely independent authority, wielding sovereign power.

In Tamiḷ we say *"savaran"* for the pound sterling. The "pound" is also a unit of weight. In the old days silver having the same weight was also called pound. Later, somehow, a gold coin weighing 72 *kundumaṇis*[5] came to be called a pound. This coin carries the effigy of the "sovereign" ruler of Britain. That is how it came to be called "sovereign" : in Tamiḷ the word became *"savaran"*. *"Savaran"* and "svarṇam" (gold) sound alike. So "svarṇam" being called *savaran* is doubly apt.

Ambā is the ruling authority, the sovereign queen: that is why she is called "Rājarājeśvarī". Her consort does not have the authority to rule, so it is not proper to call him "Rājarājeśvara". "Tripurasundarī" is another important name of hers. As I have told you she is the subject of the *Saundaryalaharī*. There is no "Tripurasundara" to pair with "Tripurasundarī". Tripurasundarī is a beauty beyond compare; there is none as beautiful as she is in all the three worlds. Śiva's beauty does not compare with hers; that is why he is not called "Tripurasundara". Having said that she is foremost in beauty, how can he too be said to be the same? However attractive he is to look at he can only be second to her in beauty. That is why he is not called "Tripurasundara".

Two are obviously needed for desire to arise, desire for each other; so we have Kāmeśvara and Kāmeśvarī, the beautiful pair. Seated on the Pañcabrahmāsana, she, who is the power entire of the Parabrahman, and called Kāmeśvarī because she is linked to the desire outwardly manifested by the Parabrahman, conducts her sport, the cosmic drama of creation, with her husband Kāmeśvara.

It is for the purpose of the creation of the world and the conduct of its affairs that the pañcakṛtya is performed. It is all because Kāmeśvarī desires to be revealed in many different forms and it is on account of the kāma or desire of hers that she is called Kāmeśvarī. She desires to make herself many, multifarious, and make these many entities separate from herself through Māyā. "Can there be such a desire? And is it not a cruel desire?" If you ask thus, the answer is : "It is not so." In the end, may be after many yugas[6] or kalpas[7], it is Ambā's intent to bring together all those separated and absorb them in herself as one. There is greater joy in coming together again after being separated for long. If someone has been staying long with us there is not much affection between him and us. But if he is separated from us, goes to another place or another country and returns after a long period, we feel greater affection for him; and he too, for the same reason, feels greater affection for us. We must view Ambā's desire similarly. She makes herself us (that is Ambā divides herself into many and keeps them all separate entities) and pushes us into Māyā and later, out of her great love, makes them (us) all one (with her). It is all for the greater joy that is derived from the reunion. Does not a mother love to play hide and seek with her child?

The waters of the ocean evaporate and in the form of clouds travel a hundred, two hundred, miles, condense into rain which falls on earth; the rain water becomes a river which meanders through the land and finally falls into mother ocean that had given it birth.

Kāmeśvarī, who is with Kāmeśvarā, is seated on the Pañcabrahmāsana. The Brahman and its Śakti entire, particularly the Śakti entire that is in the form of desire, are above everything. It is from this pair that the pañcakṛtya, the cosmic drama of creation and so on, are enacted.

When the same concept is manifested in a gross form, Kāmesvarī is seated on the left side of the lap of Kāmeśvara on the Pañcabrahmāsana and the two face east. In keeping with it, the leg in south-east (the cardinal point of Agni) is Brahmā; the leg in south-west (the cardinal point of Nirṛti) is Viṣṇu; the leg in north-west (the cardinal point of Vāyu) is Rudra; and the leg in north-east (the cardinal point of Īśāna) is appropriately enough Īśvara. The seat joining the legs together is Sadāśiva. Brahma-Śakti derived from Brahma-Śakti is divided by Brahma-Śakti into the five functions performed by the five deities. They are called Pañcabrahma and the seat made up by them is Pañcabrahmāsana.

Conrary to the name "Brahma" suggesting a high position, each of the five is also called by a name that might sound scary to you : it is "preta" or "corpse." The *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam*, which includes the name, "Pancabrahmāsanasthitā", has also these names, "Pañcapretāsanāsīnā" and "Pañcapretamañcādhiśāyinī". The idea is that if Ambā were not to give the five deities the power to perform their five respective functions they would be no better than corpses, like a car that has lost its horsepower, like a fused bulb.

For Kāmeśvara also she is the life-breath. There is a name illustrating this, "Kāmeśvara-prāṇa-nāḍī" : this name we find both in the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam* and in the *Triśatī.* However, keeping worldly dharma in view, according to which a woman's greatness lies in being together with her husband, Parāśakti, despite her great strength, remains with Kāmeśvara who occupies a higher place.

Notes & References

[1] "Having ruled over me, after having made me Śivam."

[2] There are other explanations for the function of tirodhāna performed by Īśvara and the function of anugraha performed by Sadāśiva. But our Mahāguru explains the terms here on the basis of Bhāskararāya's commentary on the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam* in which occurs the name "Anugrahapradā". Bhāskararāya's remarks about the two functions: "Tirodhānānugrahau bandha-mokṣau vā" --(tirodhāna is the bondage of worldly existence, that is veiling with Māyā that causes it; anugraha is removing the veil and granting liberation).

[3] "Pañcakṛtya-paramānanda-tāṇḍava". Through this dance Naṭarāja performs the function of creation with the sound of his drum; protects the world with his abhaya-hasta; carries out the function of destruction with the fire held in one of his hands; with the foot placed on Mūsalaka he accomplishes the function of veiling; and the fifth function of anugraha he carries out by pointing his finger at his sacred left foot.

[4] "Śo'kāmayata. Bahu syām prajāyeyeti...."
— *Taittirīya Upaniṣad,* 2.6.1.

[5] *Kundumani* is a small red seed traditionally used by goldsmiths as a weight. It is *Abrus pricatorus.*

[6] Kaliyuga—432,000 years; Dvāpara—864,000 years; Treta—1,296,000 years; Kṛta—1,728,000 years.

[7] A kalpa is one-seventh of the life-span of Brahmā.

Chapter 25

Śiva and Hara

"For Śiva to be able even to stir he must be united with you. Union with you has such glory. And such a one as you Hara worships," thus speaks the Ācārya addressubg Ambā. He mentions two, Śiva and Hara. The first is able to stir only because of his being with Ambā; the second pays obeisance to her. It is by taking up this pallavi[1] that I have done so much *niraval*[2] and svara[3] (svaraprastāra).

Why are two names mentioned, Śiva and Hara? How are the two different in the duties they perform?

Śiva, about whom no more is said than that he stirs (only because of his being with Śakti), is the primary principle, the Parabrahman, mentioned by the Śākta and Śaiva systems. He is Kāmeśvara, the husband of Kāmeśvarī, the one seated on the Pañcabrahmāsana. Since he is Ambā's husband he is not said to adore her or prostrate himself before her. The reason for this is not only the place he occupies. Knowing himself and then desiring to manifest himself outwardly: beyond this he is not capable of anything. Ambā who is always with him as "citśakti", the power of jñāna, did no more than involve him in icchāśakti (the power of desire). She did not impart him kriyāsakti (the power of doing) and involve him in the performance of any deed. For it (the performance of functions with kriyāśakti) she created the pañcakṛtya deities. Śiva does not know any outward function, nor can he perform any such function. So there is no question of his worshipping Ambā or of prostrating himself before her. The "wave" of desire was created in him, that is in one who was like the still ocean of tranquillity that does not break into waves. But when there was a wave in the ocean which had been like a vast sheet of metal there occurred a movement. Without the agency of some power (a driving force) how can there be any movement? So it means he was now with Śakti.

"Hara" is the same as the "Rudra" among the pañcakṛtya deities and his function is destruction. The Ācārya has made this clear by putting his name along with those of Hari and Viriñca (Viṣṇu and Brahmā): "Hari-Hara-Viriñcādibhiḥ."

Śiva and Hara

In Śaiva-Siddhānta, Hara denotes Śiva, the Absolute : *"Śivan, Aran*[4]*"*: the two are spoken of equally highly. Not only that, from time immemorial the custom has existed throughout the country of what is called raising the chant of "Puṇḍarīkam"[5] to Śiva. A group of devotees chant in chorus, "Hara-Hara-Mahādeva". In Tamiḷ Nāḍu the chant becomes *"Arohara"*.

Notes & References

[1] See Notes and References, Chapter12.

[2] Variations of a melodic line, "filling".

[3] Solfa singing.

What the Mahāsvami means is this : that with the idea of Śiva being able to stir only because of Śākti and of Hara paying obeisance to Ambā (that is Śakti) serving as a refrain, he has been able to elaborate upon the basic theme of the hymn.

[4] Tamiḷ for Śiva and Hara.

[5] See next chapter.

Chapter 26

"Puṇḍarīkam"—"Nāmam"

I said "raising the chant of puṇḍarīkaṁ". From the context in which I said it you must have understood that it means a group of people chanting the names of the Lord in chorus. Why should chanting or singing the names of the Lord by a devout group be called "raising the chant of puṇḍarīkaṁ" (in Tamiḷ *"puṇḍarīkaṁ poḍuvatu")?* Two reasons occur to me — but I am merely guessing.

Where do you find, more than anywhere else, groups and groups of devotees chanting the names of the Lord? At Paṇḍharīpuram (Paṇḍharpūr, Mahārāṣṭra). Here the chant of the devotees, *"Jai Jai Viṭhaḷ!"*[1] fills the air. After the devotees conclude chanting a string of names, the crowd of worshippers say aloud: *"Jai Puṇḍarīka Varada! Hari Viṭhal!"* After Mahārāṣṭrians had established their rule in Tañjāvūr, their Harikathā[2], Lāvaṇī, *rasavaṅgi* and *tanker paccaḍi* and so on gained popularity in these parts. Their influence was felt in the conduct of our *bhajans* also. In the group chanting of the Lord's names, the words *"Jai Puṇḍarīka Varada"* were now added. The very fact that the words were newly added to their *bhajans* was a reason why they made a deep impression on the minds of the devotees here. The result : whatever the god or goddess whose names were sung the term *"puṇḍarīkam poḍuvatu"* came to be applied to the concluding part of the *bhajan*. In the case of Śiva it was "Namaḥ Pārvatī-pataye — Hara-Hara-Mahādeva!" and in the case of Śrī Kṛṣṇa it was "Gopikājīvana-smaraṇam—Govinda, Govinda!"

The habit of drinking tea has existed in China for a very very long time. When Europeans came to Asia as traders and conquerors they learned about tea and introduced it into Europe. Especially because it was a new beverage, tea gained in popularity among Englishmen particularly. Any occasion on which light refreshments were served came to be called a tea - party, even if tea was not served in it. In the same way, in the *bhajans* entirely devoted to Śiva, the chant, "Namaḥ Pārvatī-pataye — Hara-Hara-Mahādeva!", came to be called "puṇḍarīkam".

Another reason also occurs to me. "Puṇḍarīka" means "lotus". Cidambaram which is the hṛdaya-kamala (heart-lotus) of the universe is called "Puṇḍarīkapura". The term "hṛd-puṇḍarīka" occurs in the śāstras. We know the lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa as "Puṇḍarīkākṣa".

But why should the chanting of the "nāmam" of the Lord by a group of devotees be called "puṇḍarīkam"?

"Nāmam" of course means "name". The mark applied to the forehead by Vaiṣṇavas is called nāmam. Why? As they apply the mark to the different parts of their body, Vaiṣṇavas chant twelve names of Viṣṇu — Keśava, Nārāyaṇa, Mādhava and so on.[3] Since the rite is accompanied by the chanting of the names of Viṣṇu as a mantra it came to be called "nāmam" : it is similar to the gold coin with the effigy of the sovereign itself being called "sovereign".

In the beginning, the sacred mark on the forehead resembled a lotus or a lotus petal. Don't we call such a mark "tilaka"? "Tilaka" means "tila" or a sesame seed. Is not a lotus petal shaped like a sesame seed?

"Tilaka" is an adornment, that is a mark meant to beautify (the face). To purify the body, according to the rules laid down in the śāstras, people applied the sacred ashes (vibhūti) to the forehead (and other parts of the body) in the form of three stripes. To enhance their appearance and as a perfume they applied sandal-paste in the shape of a lotus petal to the forehead. The mark according to the śāstras is, however, vibhūti. In course of time, as different religious sects appeared, different sacred marks also came into use. A change occurred with regard to the wearing of ashes also as required by the śāstras. Women, among a section of Smārtas[4], gave up wearing ashes and, instead, began wearing what is called "gopī-candanam" (a kind of clay made into a paste) not as stripes but as a mark resembling the lotus in shape. When the two sects, Smārtas and Vaiṣṇavas, became differentiated, the latter began wearing the nāmam with *tiruman.*[5] If you look at a nāmam closely you will find that it too is basically shaped like a lotus. Vaiṣṇavas call it the mark of the sacred feet of "Perumāḷ", that is Viṣṇu. Is not the sacred pāda (foot) of the Lord called "Lotus"?

I said that one of the names of the lotus was "puṇḍarīka". People often say *"puṇḍram"* for "puṇḍarīka". Some sections of people gave up totally the practice of wearing ashes in the form of the three stripes and took to wearing the *gopi* or *tiruman* not only to bedeck themselves but also as a mark in keeping with the śāstras pertaining to their sects. Since then all sacred marks applied to the forehead, including the wearing of ashes in the form of the three stripes, have come to be called *"puṇḍram"*. The stripes do not resemble the lotus even remotely but they came to be known as *"tripuṇḍram"* and the marks like *gopi* and *tirumaṇ* worn vertically came to be called *"ūrdhva-puṇḍram"*. Any new movement, as it becomes more and more active, is likely to attract the attention of all. Similarly, when Vaiṣṇavas emerged as a considerably big group with an independent tradition and became active, their separate rites and observances should have attracted wide attention. So the *"puṇḍram"* they wore must have been adopted as the name of all marks worn on the forehead.

Now, interestingly enough, the wheel has come full circle : what was up is now down. Did not the mark on the forehead applied with the chanting of the names of the Lord come to be called "nāmam"? Did not the same mark also have the name of *"puṇḍram"* and *"puṇḍarīka"*? That is "nāmam" came to be equated with the *"puṇḍram"*. The distinction between the nāmam on the forehead and the nāmam meaning the name(s) of the Lord must have been lost. And *puṇḍram* must have acquired the meaning of the names of the Lord. When Vaiṣṇavas formed into groups and went from place to place to propagate their faith, they must have chanted aloud, "Govinda! Govinda!" This practice of raising the chant of the names of Bhagavān must have got the name of *"puṇḍram poḍuvatu"*, *"puṇḍarīkam-poḍuvatu"!* In course of time the term must have been applied to chanting the names of any god, whether Śiva or some other deity.

I said we raise the chant of *"puṇḍarīkam"* with "Hara-Hara Mahādeva!" It is because the name of Hara is regarded as important as that of Śiva: so it is that Saṁbāndhamūrtisvāmī[8] says in his hymn, beginning with *"Vāzhka Antaṇar"*, *"Aran nāmame śuzhka"*. But in this hymn (the *Saundaryalaharī*) the Ācārya has it that Hara is Rudra, the one who has the function of dissolution. He who was given the power of carrying out this function by Ambā pays obeisance to her along with Brahmā and Viṣṇu : "Atastvām ārādhyām Hariharaviriñcādibhiḥ."

Notes & References

[1] Strictly "Viṭhṭhal(a)".

[2] Known as *kīrtan* in Mahārāṣṭra itself.

[3] The twelve names: Keśava, Nārāyaṇa, Mādhava, Govinda, Viṣṇu, Madhusūdana, Trivikrama, Vāmana, Śrīdhara, Hṛṣīkeśa, Padmanābha, Dāmodara.

[4] "Smārtas" literally mean those who adhere to the tenets of the Smṛtis. But the term has come to mean followers of Śaṅkara.

[5] A kind of sacred earth worn by Vaiṣṇavas. It is purified white clay and stands for the truth that everything is of the earth and mingles with it.

Chapter 27

Śiva's Spandana or Vibration

Ambā has urged Rudra, that is Hara, to perform the function of destruction. But Śiva, who is the Brahman, she has just made to stir. The word "spandana" occurs in the first stanza of the hymn in the form, "spanditum", to pulsate. The Parabrahman was like a calm lake which is not disturbed even by a ripple. Now this spandana was the first wave, the first pulsation, in the Parabrahma-Śiva and it was an outward manifestation of desire, that is icchā or kāma.

True, the first pulsation was desire. If pulsation is created in the quiescent Śiva, if an act like desiring is caused in the actionless Śiva, it has to be through some power or śakti. It is not merely that the citśakti, the power of jñāna, inhering in the Parabrahman, divided itself into icchāśakti and kriyāśakti, the power of desire and the power of creation. The arousal of desire in the Brahman itself is an act for which Ambā or Śakti has been instrumental.

To go deep into the fundamentals. If one has a desire one must, to start with, have an awareness that one exists. In sound sleep we have no awareness of our existence. Does any desire arise in us then? Let us suppose we faint or we have been rendered unconscious by the administration of an anaesthetic. Do we have anything like desire at this time? So if the Brahman came to have any desire it must have had, to start with, an awareness of its own existence. For the Brahman, that is by itself, to be aware of itself, to have knowledge of itself that "I, the Brahman, exist" is also an act. Is it not the ripple that occurred in the serene lake before the desire was aroused in it? It could not have been accomplished without the prodding of Śakti. It was Śakti that made Śiva aware of his existence. Such awareness on the part of Śiva--that "I am," the experience of "I" — is called "parāhantā". Do we not describe our own I-feeling as "ahantā"? The Self believing that the body and inner organs, that are false and separate from it, as constituting its true form is "ahantā". The Supreme Reality, the Root of all individual souls, knowing itself as "I" is "para ahantā" — "parāhantā". Parāśakti, it is usually said, is the personification of the parāhantā of Paramaśiva, that is the Parabrahman. In a passage in the *Saundaryalaharī* Ambā is called Parameśvara's "āhopuruṣikā"[1]. The term is commonly understood to mean boastfulness, conceit or ego-sense.

We are "kiñjit-śaktas", that is we have very little power, so it is wrong on our part to be boastful. But is it not justified on the part of the Almighty Parameśvara to be boastful, that is for him to take pride in the "I" that he is. Strangely enough, Śiva's "I-feeling" is on behalf of another. We saw that if Śiva is aware that he exists — that he knows himself as "I" -- it is because of Śakti. So if he has the "I" feeling", if he has pride in it, it is all due to the splendour of Śakti. "I, who was by myself, had no awareness of who I was. And for such as I was, she is my almighty 'I-awareness.'" The pride he takes in Ambā as his "I-awareness" is Śiva's "āhopuruṣikā." A number of commentators of the *Saundaryalaharī* have observed that Ambā is the personification of the parāhantā of Śiva, the Parabrahman.

Śiva, who is pure consciousness or jñāna, knowing himself to be what he is (that he is pure jñāna) is the first pulsation of the Brahman. There is no outward movement, no action with the hands or legs. In the state of jñāna that is full and without any thought it is pulsation caused by the thought or feeling of "I".

Ambā did not quicken Śiva from outside. She quickened him from within him as his "I-feeling".

What is called "spanda" here means an object vibrating by itself, within itself. The Ācārya uses the word very precisely. "Spanda" is not activating something from outside. It is pulsation of an object or entity within itself and not caused by an outside agency but brought about for itself and within itself.

The root cause of creation itself is vibration. The sound of the vibration of the Parabrahman became the Vedic mantras and from them originated all gross objects. Modern science supports such a view[2]. If creation was caused by the explosion of a central nucleus, it must have occurred from the pulsation within itself of the nucleus[3]. Thus the one basic object or entity pulsating within itself is spandana.

But here, with regard to a Śākta hymn apparently speaking of Śiva-Śakti in dualistic terms, can we refer to the entity in question as something that vibrates by itself? We have to say that Ambā it is who makes Śiva pulsate. That is what the Ācārya himself has said. But while doing so he has carefully chosen the word "spandana" (which means vibration of an entity within itself) so as to point to the non-dualism in what is seemingly a dualistic phenomenon.

Even according to the Śākta system it is not possible to separate Śakti from Śiva and make the former an outward entity. The two are like the lamp and its flame, like the flower and its fragrance, like milk and its whiteness, like honey and its sweetness, like the word and its meaning. Are not these pairs inseparably bound together? So, even if you give special "credit" to Śakti for Śiva's pulsation, she cannot be separated from him. The bond uniting Śiva and Śakti must ever remain a truth to be cherished in the innermost recesses of our hearts. [The Mahāsvāmī repeats the statement.] The mutual bond between Śiva and Śakti must always be felt by us in the innermost recesses of our hearts.

Certain points must be borne in mind when we consider poetical works dealing with concepts centring on gods and goddesses. In such works or hymns, one deity may be depicted as being higher or lower than another and it may even be scornfully spoken of in relation to another. There is joy and aesthetic pleasure to be derived from such depictions. And the purpose of such comparisons and of extolling a particular deity as being the highest is to make a deep impression about him or her (that deity) on the minds of devotees. In this manner, even if Ambā is shown to be higher than Śiva, or Śiva is shown to be superior to Ambā, the truth that they remain inseparably united must be embedded deep in our hearts. It is with this high intent that, even though in the very first stanza of the *Saundaryalaharī* the Ācārya raises Ambā to the highest plane and says that it is she who makes Śiva stir, he uses the word "spanda" to mean such pulsation : that is he does not use terms long in common usage like "calana" because such words would have the implication that Ambā makes Śiva pulsate by her remaining outside of him and separate from him. He uses the word "spanda" to indicate, at the very beginning, that Ambā exists within him.

I have referred now and then to Kāśmīra Śaivism. In it both the word "spanda" and the concept of "internal vibration" are important.

Kāśmīra Śaivism is so called because it originated in Kāśmīr and spread to other parts. The exponents of the doctrine did not themselves give it that name. They called it by other names. One of these is "Trika-Śaivism": it is based on the fact that it speaks of three principles, "Paśu", "Pati" and "Pāśa".

A second name is "Pratyabhijñā-śāstra". It is based on the concept it expounds: "the realization that comes ultimately that Śiva is the form of the individual Self." "Pratyabhijñā" means knowing the true nature of an object. A third name of Kāśmīra Śaivism is "Spanda-śāstra". The Parabrahman is Śiva and Śakti combined into one. According to Spanda-śāstra, the dualistic world with its manifold objects is the "ābhāsa" of the Parabrahman, reflection, the reflected image. We call the sun Bhāskara: "bhās" means "to shine". If the world is the reflection of the Parabrahman it would mean that the reflected light is outside of the original shining root-object. The view that the cosmos is outside of the Brahman is not right. If the Brahman is Śiva merely, it cannot be associated with the cosmos. So the cosmos may be said to be outside of the Brahman. In which case Śiva by himself -- that is the Brahman by itself — will not produce a reflection. According to Kāśmīra Śaivism, the Brahman is not only Śiva but Śiva and Śakti combined and it is Śakti that causes the ābhāsa.

Even so, unlike the reflection outside of the light, there is no cosmos outside of her: it is so because there cannot be anything outside of her. She is the power of everything, being in every object and also supporting it from outside and indeed grasping with her mouth [encompassing] all of them together: such is the concept of Śakti. It is within the one entity called Śiva-Śakti, in the inner pulsation in which the one becomes many that is the spanda, that all the dualistic world is contained. There is nothing that is revealed outwardly. It is like the flame of a lamp reflected in a mirror : without the mirror there can be no image. It is like this, says Kāśmīra Śaivism. The word "spanda" goes to show that not only is there no cosmos outside of the Brahman or separate from it, but also that Śakti does not create the cosmos from the Brahman by being outside of the Brahman or by being separate from it. It also shows that this Śakti is inseparably united with Śiva. "Spanda" denotes "self-movement": there is no movement referred to here caused by any prodding from outside.

It is this Kāśmīra Śaivism, also called Spanda-śāstra, among the Śaiva systems, that comes very close to our Ācāryā's Advaita. It also comes to the conclusion of non-dualistic liberation. The Ācārya says that the world is the creation of Māyā and that it is a lie (mithyā). Kāśmīra Śaivism, however, has it that the world is also real since it is the reflection of the Brahman, that is the Reality. Māyā which causes the world that we see and Īśvara who conducts it, Kāśmīra Śaivism elaborates these two concepts of the Ācārya by adding many other aspects and it has Śiva-Śakti in the place of the Brahman. Even though it mentions Śiva first and Śakti second as it enumerates its 36 principles, it states at the same time that Śiva inheres citśakti, that is jñāna. Śiva, the Fundamental Reality (sat), always exists with citśakti (the power of jñāna) as sat-cit. But it is explained that, since the ānanda (bliss) in sat-cit-ānanda is revealed only when the cosmic drama is unfolded by Śakti, we have first Śiva who is sat-cit and then Śakti as ānanda.

References

[1] *Saundaryalaharī*, 7.

[2] See Chapter 7, "Sound and Creation", Part V, *Hindu Dharma*.

[3] The reference is to the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe.

Chapter 28

Hymn Composed with an Open Mind

Our Ācārya has composed the *Saundaryalaharī* as a devotional hymn and as a Śākta work for those who are not capable of following the path of jñāna. While doing so he speaks of the idea of spanda which is dealt with in Kāśmīra Śaivism and of concepts like "paśu-pati-pāśa" found not only in that system but in other Śaiva disciplines also. In the penultimate stanza (99) of the hymn he says that one who is devoted to Ambā will be freed from the noose of paśu and experience eternally the rasa of supreme bliss : "Kṣapita paśupāśa vyatikaraḥ".

What were the Ācārya's aims in composing this hymn? What benefits did he want his devotees to derive from reading it? Being a hymn to Ambā, exclusive devotion must be created for her in her devotees and for this purpose she must be shown as occupying the highest plane of glory. He thought of composing a beautiful poem keeping in view the requirements of poetics. He also wanted to give in it importance to the Śrīvidyā point of view. Even though excessive stress was not to be laid on Advaita, Advaitik ideas were necessarily to find expression here and there in the poem, especially since they generally conformed to the Śrīvidyā tantra.

What was said about Śiva and Śakti with respect to certain concepts and certain poetic traditions and conventions were not to create wrong impressions on the minds of people lacking in maturity, impressions that would be contrary to worldly strīdharma. The Ācārya had therefore to highlight here and there the code of conduct to be observed by our women. Instead of saying that it was according to his own resolve that he composed the *Saundaryalaharī*, the proper thing for him to say would be that it was according to Ambā's resolve that he composed the hymn [fulfilling the aims mentioned above]. However, though he kept these basic aims in mind while composing the hymn, he did not take an aggressive partisan stand to propagate any particular view. He composed the work with an open mind, with a broad mind, and the poem came in a flow from him naturally, and spontaneously, without any bias. It sprang from his experience of non-dualism, from his knowledge of Śrīvidyā tantra and his respect for it, and, above all, from his poetic genius. And the feelings, the rasas^g, the poetic ideas came rising in a flow in the manner it should.

"Lahari" means a flow. It cannot take an upward course. If there happen to be rocks in its way it cannot break them but it will naturally narrow itself. Similarly, though there were some restrictions, the Ācārya did not lay down any rules as to how his hymn should take its course. He gave free rein to his poetic imagination, to his poetic fancy. In this flow came waves of thoughts that were to be systematized centuries later like the Śaiva Śiddhānta, Kāśmīra Śaivism, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita and so on, and he gave poetic expression to aspects of these doctrines in his hymn.

The religious doctrines that I referred to just now had not developed fully during the time of the Ācārya. The chief ācāryas or proponents of these doctrines appeared long after him and they have made detailed references to his Advaita while expounding their own respective systems which are different from, or even contrary to, it. However, these systems had existed in a rudimentary form before their time. Advaita itself had existed before our Ācārya, but it was he who established it as a full-fledged philosophical system.

It is in the same way that what we regard as the chief ācāryas of the other systems built their schools of thought on the basis of ideas that had been prevalent earlier. Our Ācārya, being a sarvajña (omniscient), had knowledge of these systems as they existed then in their rudimentary form and it is natural that ideas drawn from them should find expression here and there in his own works.

The first stanza itself shows the heights of imagination reached by the Ācārya and it is poetry that is like the current of a river in flood breaking its embankments and spilling over. So we see in it the Ācārya, happy about the Brahman pulsating., celebrating the one (Śakti) who made it pulsate. The ultimate Truth is the state of the quiescemt Śiva, Śiva who is called Sthāṇu because he is still, motionless, like a lump or log of wood. This is the state of the Nirguṇa Brahman^g, the non-dualistic state of the One Reality. Māyā Śakti shows it as the dualistic cosmos. The non-dualism that the Ācārya teaches does not speak of Māyā being contained in the Brahman making it pulsate. It does not refer even to Māyā remaining outside of the Brahman and making it pulsate and creating the dualistic universe. The non-dualistic Brahman cannot be unstill and cannot pulsate. It is by itself. According to Advaita it is on its basis or authority that Māyā wills and reveals the cosmos. Here Māyā is something reprehensible. It is because our Ātman (the individual Self) is also the Nirguṇa Brahman. And is it not this Māyā that conceals it and causes us to suffer by making us believe that the body and the mind are the true "we" (Self)? That is why all the diatribes against Māyā.

The Śakti that is condemned as Māyā in Advaita is glorified here without the appellation of Māyā being given to her. If the pulsation in Śiva leads ultimately to the creation of the dualistic world, the power that causes it must be the Māyā mentioned in Advaita. But the Ācārya adores her in this hymn.

The Nirguṇa Brahman of Advaita has no connection whatsoever with Īśvara, the Saguṇa Brahman that conducts the world with the power of Māyā. It (the Nirguṇa Brahman) is by itself and cannot be associated with anything outside of it. Somehow, and it is a wonder no one can explain, Māyā reveals the Nirguṇa Brahman as the dualistic world. In the dim light of dusk the rope appears to be a serpent. Has the rope really changed into a serpent? The serpent is an appearance—a phantom—that arises from the rope. But is there, in fact, any connection between the rope and the serpent?

But, in the Śākta system dealt with by the Ācārya in this hymn, Māyā Śakti is not something unconnected with the Brahman. No great importance is given to Brahma-Śakti in Advaita. Here it is of the utmost importance: Parāśakti is Ambā. The function of Māyā is one of her aspects. At the same time, she is citśakti that is jñāna and the very opposite of Māyā. Also she is kriyāśakti and icchāśakti. She is inseparably associated with Śiva, the Nirguṇa Brahman; indeed she is one with him. Here the union of Śiva and Śakti is all-important. "Union" means more than being together. It means oneness. Does not "ekam" mean this? The quality of "ekam", of being one, is "aikyam". In one of the concluding verses of the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam*, the name "Śivā" is followed by "Śiva-Śakti-aikya-rupiṇī". The "Śiva" in the name is more or less the Parabrahman according to Advaita. It is by uniting with him —- the two form a "daṁpati", a couple — and by causing pulsation in him that she creates the world and conducts it.

If there is a power, there must also be a source for it, something on which it is dependent, an "āśraya". If you speak of a weight of 10 kilograms, this weight or power must belong to an iron rod or something else. You cannot speak of a weight without its āśraya. There is a power called fragrance. Can it exist without an āśraya, for instance a flower? In this way the root of all śakti, that is Parāśakti, has the āśraya from which she cannot be dissociated, and that āśraya is Śiva or the Brahman. It is the energy of Śiva that is Śakti. "Separate the whiteness from the milk," or "Separate the sweet taste from the milk." Are such things possible? So whatever is performed through or by Śakti, Śiva must inevitably be a part of it. How do we add the sweetness of milk to a medical concoction? Can we do so by separating the sweetness from the milk and then adding it to the concoction? In all the doings of Śakti, Śiva must necessarily be present.

According to Śākta texts like Śrīvidyā the liberation obtained by the individual Self through the grace of Ambā is the attainment of the tranquil Advaitik Nirguṇa state. Though such is the case with the jivātman or the individual Self, the prime Entity, according to such texts, is associated with Śakti, apart from tranquillity.

All the activity, all the whirl of the dualistic world, is for this prime Entity to find pleasure and enjoyment in witnessing the amazing "throw" of Śakti. Creation is for the prime Entity's joy in sport.

It is, however, not totally correct to say that creation is for joy, for the joy of sport. If it is said that Ambā performs the function of creation for ānanda, it would mean that she is not in the state of ānanda when she does not perform a function. Can we speak of such a one as "Saccidānandasvarūpiṇī"? So, instead of saying that she conducts the sport of creation for ānanda, we must say that she conducts the sport (or sports herself) because of her natural state of ānanda, bliss.

Chapter 29

Advaita Māyā and Śakti in the Śaiva and Śākta Doctrines

According to the Śākta discipline also there is Māyā associated with creation. The Śākta and Śaiva āgamas are thus broadly in agreement on the subject. However, in Advaita, the Brahman is one thing and Māyā quite another; and the Brahman is concealed by Māyā and it is on its basis, on its support, that the cosmos makes its appearance. In the Śākta system the matter does not end thus. Starting with Śiva, that is the Brahman which inheres Śakti, it speaks of five "pure tattvas" or principles and then only comes to Māyā which is the sixth principle. It is the same case with Kāśmīra Śaivism. In it five "pure principles" are mentioned first and then 31 "impure principles" starting with Māyā. In the Śaiva Siddhānta prevalent in Tamiḷ Nāḍu also a total of 36 principles are mentioned but all of them are associated with Māyā. These 36 are divided into five "pure Māyā" principles and 31 "impure Māyā" principles. Let us now see the Śākta system in its authentic form.

In the Śākta discipline, first comes the Śiva tattva which inheres cit that is jñānaśakti and remains quiescent. Then comes the Śakti tattva which is well manifested outwardly. The third is the Sadāśiva tattva which is associated with icchāśakti. The fourth is the Īśvara tattva which is combined with jñānaśakti. The fifth is the vidyā tattva which is linked with kriyāśakti. The sixth is the Māyā tattva.

I said that citśakti remains with the first tattva of Śiva and that it is the same as jñānaśakti. I also said that the fourth, the Īśvara tattva, is combined with jñānaśakti. What is mentioned as the second tattva, Śakti, is indeed citśakti. How are we to understand all this?

The first tattva is Śiva, the Reality, the Truth; he is the prime factor in whom citśakti is an inner entity. The second tattva is citśakti as the prime factor and Śiva, the Reality, remaining in the background. The jñāna called "cit" is not knowledge alone. It is knowledge that is imbued with life; it is consciousness. You must have heard of "jaḍa" and "cetana", that is "insentient" and "sentient". "Cetana" is derived from cit. "Jaḍa" means "without life, feelings, knowledge"—like stone, earth, gold, silver and so on. "Jaḍa" is also called "acetana". All living beings that have urges, feelings and knowledge belong to the cetana category. All of us belong to this class, also birds and beasts. The term "caitanya" (abstract noun) is derived from "cetana". Ambā is called "Caitanya-svarūpiṇī". She is the life-giving power or energy of the Supreme Entity. It is this life-force that is knowledge or awareness, feelings and urges. "Jñāna" is knowing what is experienced, or "cit". To know by reading a book that sugar is sweet is not jñāna. Jñāna here is the sweetness experienced by tasting or eating the sugar. Knowledge or knowing is possible only to the living. Cit is that with which such life-force is united. Life is the basic, fundamental, śakti. So, it follows, that śakti means citśakti. The life-breath of the Brahman, its self-awareness, is citśakti.

Since jñāna means not only knowing but also living and consciously experiencing something, the word used for the same in English is not "knowledge" but the beautiful term "consciousness". If we are conscious of something it means that we have our own experience of it. Such experience is possible only if there is life-force in us.

Why is Śiva regarded as the first tattva and Śakti, that is Śiva-Śakti, as the second? Take the case of a "sandow"[1]. We know that he possesses his strength even when he is sleeping. But it is known only when he is awake. Śiva tattva may be likened to the sleeping sandow, and Śakti tattva to the sandow awake. The sandow who is awake feels he must show his strength : that is the third tattva, icchāśakti. The one who possesses it is Sadāśiva.

I said that the fourth tattva, Īśvara, was also united with jñānaśakti. This might cause confusion. After stating that the first tattva is associated with cit or jñānaśakti, will it not cause confusion in the minds of people if it is said that the fourth tattva again is combined with jñānaśakti? The cit first mentioned is the absolute jñāna of the One Prime Entity. The jñāna contained within awakens and becomes aware of itself in the second stage. In the third stage it wishes to manifest its force. In the fourth, it "plans" to reveal outwardly its inwardly turned jñāna as the cosmos unfolding itself as many entities (plurally). If it "planned" many worlds does it not mean that its jñāna is also not one within and that it is the foundation for its being revealed in many ways? What was the one jñāna is described as cit and the same as the basis for many jñānas in the fourth stage is described as "jñāna"—the two have been denoted by two different words.

What was "planned" in the fourth stage is "executed" in the fifth. What was "planned" by jñāna is now implemented. This is what is described as the "pure vidyā tattva" that is combined with kriyāśakti. This does not mean that the Brahman has already begun to be revealed as the outward cosmos. In the fifth stage it prepares itself to do so. After waking up we try to shake off our lethargy by stretching our limbs so as to ready ourselves for the day's work. The fifth stage is similar. A "sandow", on entering the arena, slaps his thighs and shoulders, as a warming-up exercise, before facing his rival. The fifth stage is similar. The act of creating the cosmos outside of the Brahman has not yet begun. In the fifth stage it gathers all its strength, its kriyāśakti, in preparation for the purpose. Without being transformed kriyāśakti has gathered itself together within Śiva-Śakti, that is the Brahman. However, the resolve has been made to become manifest outwardly. The entity that is one, because it is going to become dual (or plural), remains with the knowledge that it and its manifestation are equal in weight. It is this jñāna that is called "pure vidyā".

I have mentioned three different "powers", icchāśakti, jñānaśakti and kriyāśakti, in that order. I shall give an example from life to show that this order is right. When a child is born it has the icchā or desire to feed itself with its mother's milk. Without this desire it will not imbibe milk. It cries because of this desire. Then comes its stage of jñāna or knowledge that only by sucking (at its mother's breast) can it imbibe milk. Without this jñāna how can it imbibe milk? The jñāna that it must suck (its mother's breast) is proved thus. After this is the stage of kriyā: the child actually sucks at its mother's breast.

I told you that, unlike in Advaita, in the Śākta system (as well as in the Śaiva śāstra) Māyā comes as the sixth tattva, after the fifth tattva of "pure vidyā" which itself is four stages after the Brahman.

The creation of the actual dualistic world is after the preparation for the outward dualistic manifestation. It is in this sixth stage that appear all creatures, individual souls. Until this stage is reached there is only the one Śiva-Śakti. Can it ever be affected by Māyā? It is only after people (individual souls) are created from Śakti as an outward manifestation of herself — to delight herself in sport, and to play hide and seek with them — that she has them bound to Māyā. She thus makes them oblivious of the truth that they too are the One Entity [that she herself is] and keeps them under the illusion that they are the body, the senses and the inner organs (antaḥ-karaṇa).

The wonderful force that Śakti happens to be is demonstrated not only by the clouds at sunrise and sunset, by moutains like the Himālaya or the seven seas but even by the brilliance of a dew-drop on the tip of a blade of grass reflecting the light of the sun. But all these phenomena of the vast insentient world are not sufficient for Śiva-Śakti to complete the joy of the drama that is enacted as her sport. So she delights herself further by creating sentient beings, individual souls, and makes them unaware of their root (that is she makes them unaware that they too are the One Entity) by keeping them bound to Māyā.

"That is all right. Ambā may find delight in such sport. But does she not make our plight unbearable? What she finds delight in is an ordeal for us—is that not so? If she has four or five pure aspects above Māyā what do we gain by it? The fact that we are squeezed and strangled by Māyā, is that not an *accu mulai*[2] in our life?" so people may ask.

True, it is so. That is the reason why the Ācārya has given importance to Māyā and expounded the philosophy of Advaita as a way pointing to its eradication. In systems like Śākta, Māyā comes as the sixth tattva but even so they do accept that it is important. Whatever the system advocated, its purpose is to show people a path to follow. So it must pay the maximum attention to the problem that seems the most important to them. Although Ambā is above Māyā as śuddha tattvas (pure principles) what we know about her is that, in the form of Māyā, she keeps us bound to saṁsāra (the cycle of birth and death). That is why just as the Parabrahman has the Praṇava, Śakti has for its bījākṣara[g] not only "Śakti-bīja" but also "Māyā-bīja". Since any system is centred on people, Ambā is often referred to as "Māyā" and "Mahāmāyā". Stress is laid on this fact in the *Durgā-Saptaśatī*. Muttusvāmī Dīkṣitar[g] sang the praises of Ambā, addressing her as "Māyā".

"All that is right. But when the Śākta doctrine also agrees that, as Māyā, Ambā has cast us into stupor and kept us bound, how is it right to extol and worship her, that is Śakti? This power keeps us hidden from our true identity and drags us down by giving us the mind, the senses, the world and worldly goods and also loves and hates. Is not the right thing then to do what the Ācārya does in his Advaita philosophy of excoriating her, that is Māyā? Why then should there be pūjā to her and a hymn to celebrate her? Why has the Ācārya who attacks Māyā composed a hymn like this?"

Such a question would be justified if the Mahā-śakti were no more than the Māyā-śakti. The point to note is that she, the Māyā-śakti, is also the jñānaśakti. Is she not also the anugraha-śakti (the power that grants us grace), the anugraha-śakti that bestows jñāna on us and frees us from Māyā? As I said earlier, she keeps the individual Self bound to Māyā: the purpose of the same is for her to have the "extra" joy derived from the sport of separating us from the One Entity and uniting us again with It. In sum, she protects us remaining herself not only as Māyā-śakti but as jñānaśakti, anugraha-śakti, prema-śakti and saundarya-śakti.

What are these new śaktis like prema-śakti, anugraha-śakti, saundarya-śakti and so on, not included among those mentioned before, the ones starting from cit? The answer to such a question is that all these new śaktis are contained in icchāśakti about which I have already spoken. "Icchā" means "desire". What does it mean to be loving or affectionate? Does it not denote desire? The primordial icchā of Ambā did not stop with the desire of dividing herself into many separate jīvātmans [people, individual souls]. Ambā has icchā for them, that is she has great love for them, that is the love of a mother for her childern. How can Ambā not have affection for those born of herself? Mother, children, filial affection, all these came later, and affection in this world is but a reflection of her original motherly affection. It is because of her icchā or desire for the jīvātmans that she apparently pushes them into Māyā so as to derive the extra joy to be had from uniting them with her after their being separated from her. Thus bringing people under the spell of Māyā is her icchā and freeing them from it is her anugraha-icchā [the desire to grant them her grace]. This is a process, a manifestation of her icchā of freeing them little by little from Māyā and drawing them back to herself. It is to attract the world of humans that she sports as the personification of beauty, as one possessing beauty of form as well as the beauty constituted by her qualities. At first is the desire to become this, to act in this manner, and only then comes the stage of translating the desire into action. It is because of her icchā that she actually attracts people with her beauty. Icchā is the seed of all action. We mortals may act without our volition or icchā, out of some necessity or propelled by some natural force beyond us. But she, the Parabrahma-Śakti, does things only after she desires to do them, that is on her volition or icchā. Prema-śakti, anugraha-śakti and saundarya-śakti are among the many forms of icchā-śakti. What is generally known as love is prema; freeing a person, the individual Self, from Māyā and granting him release or showing him the path to reach that goal is the highest point of love, that is anugraha. Though Ambā grants us her anugraha even to pass an examination, the term anugraha really means our passing the ordeal of fire conducted by Māyā and graduating to jñāna. All this is Ambā's work. It is that which grants us unalloyed and eternal beatitude. Anugraha means making us the Brahman.

However, the Śākta and Śaiva śāstras have it that concealing the reality of our being the Brahman and our being forgetful of the same, our being in possession of a body as a jīvātman and antaḥ-karaṇa (let us take it to mean the mind) that involves the body in action, the world in which we are engaged in work or activity, the enjoyment we derive in worldly actions — all these are part of anugraha. This anugraha includes "tanu", "karaṇa", "bhuvana" and "bhoga". "Tanu" means the body, "karaṇa", the "antaḥ-karaṇa" or the mind, "bhuvana" the world, "bhoga" what is experienced by the individual Self. "What injustice is this? Giving us the four, tanu, karaṇa, bhuvana and bhoga, that are responsible for our being forgetful of our true Self as the Brahman, and undergoing suffering as jīvātmans : is this called anugraha? Does not liberation mean being freed from all the four, tanu, karaṇa, bhuvana and bhoga?" The śāstras (Śākta and Śaiva) say in reply: "After somehow becoming a jīvātman, you have been trapped in karma. There is no liberation for you until you exhaust your karma. Is it not so? How will karma be exhausted? Is it not to be worked out by experiencing it, its consequences? How are the fruits of past karma to be experienced? By being born again, by thinking good (with the mind) and doing good (with the body). To do so you need the world (bhuvana). It is only by working in the world (bhuvana), employing your body and mind (tanu and karaṇa) and having varied experience (anubhoga) that you can work out your karma. That is why being endowed with the body, mind and so on is called an anugraha. The four (tanu, karaṇa, bhuvana and bhoga) which are responsible for our being ensnared in karma are the very means of our being liberated from it. That is why the four are described as an anugraha bestowed on us. But how difficult it is to make good use of these means. So anugraha in the true sense is Ambā's grace in granting us good sense and discrimination to work out our karma and being vouchsafed the bliss of final release.

Mokṣānanda, the beatitude of liberation. After its karma has been worked out entirely, the jīvātman, the individual Self, is not inert but in a state of bliss in which it knows itself to be an entity that is full by itself. Vouchsafing us such a state is Ambā's anugraha, her grace.

Now, after bringing together all the śaktis I have so far mentioned, I am going to speak about another śakti. That is ānanda-śakti, the power of bliss. There is nothing higher than the bliss of the Ātman, the bliss of realising the Self. It is this bliss that Ambā grants us in the form of liberation. But in Ātmānanda there is Śiva but no Ambā. Without stopping after the state of fullness she unfolds her power and sports herself. The one who is ānanda herself sports joyfully outwardly also. Experiencing the bliss of the Self, she makes herself playfully into two (or dual) and as a separate entity, or seemingly as a separate entity, to manifest herself as the dualistic cosmos. When we, in an ecstasy of delight, play with whatever comes to hand, we throw it up and catch it with our hands when it comes down. Any object will do, any plank or board, for us to play the mṛdaṅgaṁ. Such behaviour is seen more pronouncedly in children. See how a child jumps about, how playful it is, when it is overcome by joy. The mahāśakti of the Brahman becomes playful when its joy waxes.

Why is such joy called sport, play? How else can you describe something done for no particular reason, for no purpose, and merely out of overflowing joy? Since Śakti is the embodiment of ānanda to start with, it would be wrong to state that her joy is revealed outwardly in dualistic creation. It would be wrong again to say that she performs the function of creation to derive joy from it. There is nothing she has to obtain, nothing she has to attain. She is fullness, not wanting for anything. If such a one performs the act of creation it means that she does so in the same way as we play about for no reason in the ecstasy of our happiness. We obtain joy in such playfulness. So we continue to keep sporting. It is in the same way that Ambā acts. If we say that she acts in the same way as we act it would mean that the image (the reflection or pratibiṁba) acts like the subject (the bimba): it would be a topsyturvy statement. It is only from her sport of creation that we ourselves derive the joy of sporting.

There is no reason behind it, nor is the sport conducted with the expectation of any fruit or reward. Sometimes we make a remark or statement without any particular reason and then we say, "I said so for the fun of it." Though the work of creation is done for no reason and for no reward, because of the joy it gave her in the beginning, Ambā continues to conduct the sport of creation. On the whole sport is a matter of joy, of ānanda. That is why ānanda is regarded as a full-fledged entity and the work of creation, carried out without any reason for it, is called "līlā" — play, sport.

This prodigious cosmic sport has been going on for crores of kalpas[g], for eons and will go on for crores of kalpas. What an immense power of joy she must be who is its source, its spring. It is sport of immeasurable dimensions. So it follows that the one who sports must be immeasurable joy personified. Although sorrow, fear and cruelty are the opposite of joy, they too are immeasurable in our life in this world. Yet Ambā goes sporting in the same manner. Considering this -- though she has many kinds of śakti -- her ānanda-śakti transcends all her other powers. Her very great joy rises bubbling up, showing that she is such an ānanda-śakti as to contain all śaktis—and in this joy all the cruelty, sorrow and fear that we experience in the world are like a dash of pickle added to *śakkara-pongal*[3] and changing its taste. From trifling types of joy -- that of eating ice-cream is one such — to the absolute bliss of realising the Self, she stands for all kinds of joy : from the paltry, trifling, to the great ineffable beatitude of liberation.

Those who regard the Parabrahman as the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa couple speak of Rādhā as Kṛṣṇa's "hlādinī-śakti" [the power that gladdens Kṛṣṇa]. "Hlāda" means joy. How is joy outwardly manifested? By laughter. The word "laugh" is to be traced to the German and to its Sanskrit root, "hlād".

Joy is the nature of life itself. Love and beauty are for joy, a means to obtain it. Did we not speak of cit as being imbued with life, feeling and jñāna. "Citkalā" is one of the names of Ambā or Śakti occurring in "The One Thousand Names of Lalitā". The names appearing next are "Ānandakālikā" and "Premarūpā". All these names are interlinked.

Notes

[1] A "sandow" is a strong man, a wrestler, or what is termed as a *pahalvān* in Hindi/ Persian. (''Sandow'', as a common noun, must be derived from Eugene Sandow.)

[2] *Accu mulai*, a stick planted in the ground to which cattle are tethered.

[3] A dish made of rice and jaggery and with ghee and spices added.

Chapter 30

Jñāna through Māyā

One who is all this [Ambā as described above] -- is it right to attack her regarding her as Māyā-śakti alone and wonder why we should perform pūjā to her? If you ask, "Has she not, Svāmi, got us bound to Māyā?" there is an answer to it. The Śākta discipline and other systems belonging to the path of devotion have it that all those things that keep us bound to Māyā are divinely connected. Although Māyā and jñāna are opposed to each other, it is as a means to take the path of jñāna that the world of Māyā, the senses and the mind are to be involved in love and in beauty that are unsullied; and pūjā, hymns and so on are prescribed so that we will be blissfully immersed in Ambā's remembrances. If our mind became one-pointed in this manner it would be easy to engage ourselves in reflections that are a necessary part of jñāna. If we adhere to the path of devotion as shown by the Ācārya we will be able to follow the path of jñāna easily, making use of the very instruments of the world of Māyā.

Those who are, to start with itself, capable of keeping their minds and senses under control and who are passionless and detached do not have to employ them (their minds and senses) in the performance of pūjā and other rites connected with devotion. They can realise the Brahman using the "short-cut" of shaking off Māyā through spiritual practice. In his teaching imparted to them the Ācārya lays stress on Māyā that is to be discarded as worthless and on the goal of the Ātman to be achieved, prescribing for the same jñāna, self-inquiry and practice aimed at attaining the ideal of Advaita. He exhorts the rest to involve their minds — which otherwise are caught in the noose of Māyā by being addicted to petty pleasures — in matters that give joy that is pure and belonging to a higher plane like remembrance of the Lord, pūjā, listening to stories of the divine, and worship at temples. In this way he shows them the path of devotion by following which they will eventually become mature and qualify for the way of jñāna. Thus it is that the Ācārya who excoriates Māyā extols her at the same time as "Mahāmāyā".

Pūjā, the singing of hymns and so on, that form part of the way of devotion, are meant for those who cannot yet cast off Māyā as taught by Advaita. Such people must regard Māyā as the sport of God, of Parāśakti, and as associated with the divine. All the objects of the world of Māyā, the senses and the mind that have them under their sway and all those things that we enjoy and thereby become spoilt, must be involved in the worship of Mahāśakti, who rules over Māyā, through pūjā, recitation of hymns, listening to the Purāṇas, worship at temples, japa and meditation. In this way these very objects must be rendered pure. While we do pūjā to Ambā we make a variety of offerings to her. *Javvādu*[1] is applied to the forehead of Ambā in the form of a *pottu:*[2] this rite is adoring her with perfumes. We dress her in beautiful clothes and bedeck her with ornaments; present before her sweet and savoury items that are made her prasāda[g]. And dance and music are not merely for our entertainment; we offer them to her with a heart that melts in devotion for her. We must associate paintings and sculptures with the divine instead of allowing them to create improper urges in us.

There is then the fivefold worship of her, what is called "pañcopacāra": the offering of perfumes (sandal-paste), flowers, incense, lights and naivedya[g]. The purpose of this is to associate the five elements and the five senses with the divine. The faculty of speech we employ to sing Ambā's praises; our ears we use to listen to stories of the divine and our eyes for the *darshan* of the Lord (or of Ambā). We throw ourselves down, prostrate ourselves before Ambā: perform "anga-pradaksiṇa"; and engage the mind in japa and meditation. All these acts belong to the path of devotion. When we are caught in Māyā it is a means of creating attachment to Mahāśakti, who is the cause of Māyā, through the very objects of Māyā.

Things connected with Māyā cannot easily be done away with. Except those who are mature, detached and possess discrimination, all the rest are constantly lured by the world, by the senses and the attachments caused by the same. Those who want to sever such ties, but are yet immature, will not succeed in their endeavour to do so. We feel angry with ourselves when we find that we cannot be freed from such ties and find ourselves without hope and feel "we can never have release". That is why, instead of discarding the objects of Māyā, they are given a divine connection. We are taught to be devoted to that Object which is the cause not only of Māyā but all else. We must love that Object and through pūjā, singing, meditation and so on worship it by means of the very instruments of Māyā. Thus if the objects created by Māyā are given a divine connection they will in due course cease to affect us, ensnare us. If you touch a live electric wire with your bare hand you will get a shock, but if you touch the same wearing gloves nothing will happen to you. Similar is the case with Māyā and the objects of Māyā. If you handle them wearing the gloves of devotion they will not affect you.

What I have in mind -- what I am going to tell you -- may seem strange. But the idea occurred to me and I feel I must express it. I was dealing with Māyā. There is everything in it except the highest stage of the realisation of the truth of the Ātman: there is in it even the means of seeking jñāna, that is sādhana. The object of sādhana^g, the one who is engaged in sādhanā, the act of sādhana — these are separate and therefore dualistic in nature. That means it is all Māyā. The effort to do away with Māyā through the instruments of Māyā is part of the sādhana for Advaitik realisation. I am not telling you something new. It has been told before. Even the act of the guru teaching his disciple, imparting him upadeśa^g is dualistic in a sense; but it is at the same time a means of obtaining non-dualistic realisation. Let me illustrate the idea. Suppose a man is dreaming and hears a lion roaring. He gets up in fright, even though it was all a dream and comes to the waking state. Even the lion of the dream is able to bring him to wakefulness. So the guru, who teaches his disciple in his dualistic life, takes him to the wakefulness of jñāna. "Since sādhana itself is dualistic, why not speak of such types of sādhana as have goals other than Advaita? When any dualistic subject used for divine purposes qualifies one to take the path of jñāna, would not the practices pertaining to other systems, their rites, their śāstras do the same (qualify one to seek jñāna)? So let me, without any reservation, compose the hymn naturally, whatever the system my thought process takes me as the stanzas take shape." We may take it that the Ācārya must have thought to himself thus and blessed us with his *Saundaryalaharī* reflecting such a view. That is why in this hymn he gives voice here and there to tantra, dualism, qualified non-dualism, and Śaiva and Śākta concepts.

Notes

[1] Musk got from the civet cat.

[2] A dot or bindu, one adorning the forehead in the same way as a tilaka. (See Glossary for "tilaka".)

Chapter 31

Śakti and Līlā in Advaita

An important point cannot but be mentioned here. One must not think that Advaita makes no mention of Śakti at all since it associates creation with Māyā. Is there any need for a man following the path of jñāna to turn to Śakti? That is why no special importance is given to it in Advaita. Otherwise, it is not true that no mention is made in it at all of anything called Śakti. When it speaks of the Paramātman, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*[1] says that it possesses all karma, all desire (kāma), all scents, all essences (rasas). The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* has it that because of the desire of the Paramātman the one Entity became multifarious — "akāmayata" is the word used here. I told you about this earlier[2]. "The Paramātman was not happy being alone by itself. So It desired a companion and itself became two as husband and wife." A view expressed in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* comes close to the Kāmeśvara-Kāmeśvarī concept[3]. Besides, this Upaniṣad says that all orders of life originated from the two, the primordial Mother and Father.

What the Upaniṣads speak of the Paramātman as being Almighty, the *Brahmasūtra* underlines when it says "Sarvopetā ca tad-darśanāt"[4].

In his commentaries on the Upaniṣads our Ācārya does not slur over questions raised by such references. Since he speaks about the concept of Māyā, he does not gloss over matters relating to Śakti. In his commentary on the *Brahmasūtra* he says clearly: "Sarva-śakti-yukta paradevatā". Since he himself regards Māyā as "anirvacanīya" ("indefinable" or "indescribable") he has no reason to be afraid of asking questions about the origins of Śakti. We cannot compare the Brahman to other objects in the world and ask questions like, "How can that be?" We can gauge the profound depths of the Brahman only by what the Vedas say about them, not by arguments, so observes the Ācārya with an air of finality[5].

The question of creation arises only when the Brahman is not by itself, when it is not absorbed in itself, in the state of samādhi. According to the Ācārya, when the Nirguṇa Brahman, in the state of pure jñāna, is associated with the creation posited by avidyā or Māyā it acquires an accession of universal power (sarva-śaktiyoga).

"The Brahman becomes united with universal power (sarvaśakti)": this means the same as "Śivaḥ Śaktyā yuktaḥ".

The concept of creation as the līlā or sport (of the divinity) is also mentioned in the *Brahmasūtra*, "Lokavat tu līlā kaivalyam." In concluding his commentary on this passage the Ācārya observes: "According to the Vedas creation does not have to do with the Supreme Truth, the Nirguṇa Brahman. It is the dualistic view, wordly tīuth ("vyavahāra satyam") born of avidyā (nescience)." Though the Ācārya speaks thus from the standpoint of Advaita, he accepts the fact of creation as the sport of Īśvara in the vyavahāra or empirical stage and speaks in praise of it, taking delight in it. He says: "The creation of the cosmos may seem to us to be a very great feat but is just play for Īśvara since he has unbounded śakti."

There is the authority of the Upaniṣads to show that the dualistic cosmos is caused by the inner vibration ("spanda") of the non-dualistic Brahman. The *Kaṭhopaniṣad* says: "All this universe is caused from the life-force called prāṇa and vibrates."[6] For "vibrates" the word used is "ejati". "Ejanam" means "kampana," that is "vibration". The meaning here may approximately be taken to be that something that vibrates inwardly by itself and not vibrating because of any force outside of it. The word used in this context in the *Brahmasūtra* is "kampanāt"[7]. Commenting on this the Ācārya observes: "The prāṇa that causes vibration is not mere breath but the Brahman itself."

If we go through the relevant texts we will come across more such statements to show that Advaita accepts the view of creation by Māyā as a worldly truth at a particular stage, thus favouring the Śākta standpoint.

References

1 "Sarvakarmā sarvakāmaḥ sarvagandhaḥ sarvarasaḥ sarvamidamabhyātto'vākyanādara eṣa ma Ātmāntarhṛdaya etadbrahmaitamitaḥ pretyābhisaṁbhavitāsmīti yasya syādaddhā na vicikitsāstīti ha smāha śāṇḍilyaḥ śaṇḍilyaḥ."
— *Chāndogya Upaniṣad,* 3.14.4.

2 See Notes & References, Chapter 24.

3 "Sa vai naiva reme tasmādekākī na ramate; sa dvitīyamaicchat."
— *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad,* 1.4.3.

4 Brahmasūtra, II. 1.30.

5 Brahmasūtrabhāṣya, II. 1.31.

6 "Yadidam kim ca jagat sarvam prāṇa ejati niḥsṛtam."
— *Kaṭhopaniṣad,* 2.3.2.

7 Brahmasūtra, 1.5.39.

Chapter 32

How We Must Approach the Hymn

It is with an open mind that the Ācārya has poured out his ideas about various religious systems as they come up in the course of composing his hymn. For that reason we must not make the mistake of thinking that his work contains a mix-up of various concepts. Like him we too must have an open mind. Indeed our mind must be rapt in the hymn as we read it and we must let the "laharī" take its course. We must also, in all humility, pray to the Ācārya and to Ambā thus: "May we be rewarded with good by reading the hymn." If we do so we will become absorbed in the same feelings and emotions as those of the Ācārya; we will in fact be bathed in them and rewarded with happiness that is divine.

Doctrines that may seem strange to you are dealt with here but that should not influence your own attitude to the hymn and you must try to derive the full benefit from it. When certain concepts are expalined —- and in the course of certain descriptions —- allegories arise and these should not be understood in an improper manner. Perhaps "allegory" is not the right word. Transforming concepts deliberately into characters of a story [symbolic representation of truths] using our imagination is "allegory". The śāstras and Purāṇas are not created out of the imagination of their authors. It is Parāśakti herself who has revealed the concepts and truths contained in them to the great men, the seers, who composed them. If this world is real, so are the concepts and stories told in these śāstras and Purānas, concepts and stories that help us to be liberated from this world and dissolve in our true form {that is the Ultimate]. Even today if we practise japa and meditation in the proper manner, if our hearts melt in devotion, we will be able to see forms revealed by Parāśakti to great men [as mentioned before]. We will be able to see them face to face. When we have *darśhan* of these divine forms, love and joy will overflow from our hearts and we will be taken to the state of experiencing our real form, the form or entity that is the source or basis of the fullness of joy. So "allegory" is not the right word in this context.

What I wish to say is this. Matters relating to the divine personification of certain concepts may give the impression of their being different from what is laid down as right and proper for us mortals, as what is good and morally correct for us. We must not think that they are wrong and not in keeping with the norms of morality. In the light in which the concepts in question are to be understood they will be regarded as right and proper.

In the same way, it is not correct to use the yardstick of our mundane life in assessing what is said according to poetic traditions, as part of poetic imagery, or according to conventions, nor should the same be rejected as opposed to norms of good conduct. To represent reality as reality is to make a carbon copy of it: it is "lokadharmī" and lacking in aesthetic value. When the same is represented in drama, some of its aspects may be underplayed and some others heightened: this is "nāṭyadharmī". In the tradition of nāṭyadharmī, the dramatists write their plays according to their poetic fancy and imagination. What applies to drama also applies to sculpture, painting and other arts. Instead of imitating nature or worldly life in all detail an artist must use his creativity, to transform (or transmute) it according to the rules of art so as to provide enhanced aesthetic satisfaction. When there is a great poetic or sculptural tradition, and works are created in that tradition, we must accept the fact that such a tradition is preserved only by the new poets and artists, following in the footsteps of their predecessors.

This is the second point to be borne in mind for a proper appreciation of the *Saundaryalaharī*. The first point is to accept the various concepts or doctrines that crop up in the course of the hymn and their appropriateness in the contexts in which they are dealt with. It is not necessary to worry about whether a doctrine appearing in a particular passage has been dealt with before or will be discussed later. The second point [to repeat] is this: Certain ideas are dealt with in the form of metaphors — or as symbolic stories — and there may be others that are explained according to the aesthetics of poetry. It would be wrong to judge them by mundane standards of good conduct. It would also be equally wrong to reject them as being in bad taste.

Only by adopting such an approach would we derive the full benefit from works like the *Saundaryalaharī* that combine poetry with śāstra.

Why I say this is because such matters (as mentioned above) are dealt with, though only briefly, in the *Saundaryalaharī* and we must approach them with a pure heart, a pure mind and with humility. Śāstras like Śrīvidyā say that creation was accomplished by Śivam, that is in place of the Brahman, and by Kāmeśvarī who is the embodiment of its icchā or desire. Here the śṛṅgāra or erotic sentiment is expressed in the form of a concept. Ideas like this are met with in this work. For centuries people have read the hymn with a pure heart. They were concerned only with the meaning of the concepts dealt with in the work and, banishing evils like kāma or desire from their hearts, they have had experience of an elevated nature. Mūka (in his *Pañcaśatī*) frequently breaks out thus: "O Mother, you have inspired kāma (desire) in Śiva himself, Śiva who is the destroyer of Kāma. You, who have been so, will banish evils like kāma from people and bless them with jñāna."

People in our country had, by and large, the right approach to the hymn. Even so the severe sādhana based on the concepts dealt with in it required learning the hymn at the feet of a guru. In such cases only the mature and the deserving received instruction from the guru. It also meant that only those who could grasp the meaning of the passages in the right spirit, passages that are otherwise likely to be improperly interpreted, were taught. In the guru-śiṣya tradition what has to be treated as a mystery, as a secret, remained well protected [from the undeserving and the immature]. Stanzas dealing with elements of śāstra or containing certain poetic imagery or descriptions were not elaborated upon when it came to explaining the hymn to people in general. They were briefly touched upon or glossed over.

What is to be underlined here is this: the basic approach of our people to the hymn has been right and proper all these centuries. "Why do we read devotional poems or listen to stories told from the Purāṇas? Or why do we go to worship in temples? To purify ourselves; to wash away the evils in us like desire; to nurture our spirit of devotion and become worthy of the grace of Īśvara." Such was the attitude of our people and they adhered to it with determination. So in that state of mind of theirs they did not pay much attention to things that seemed to go against the goals they had in mind, things like certain descriptions in a hymn, certain stories in a Purāṇa or certain sculptures in a temple. They thought to themselves, "Great men have somehow permitted these things and we must not allow ourselves to be distracted by them. Our aim is to render ourselves pure, be engaged in our devotions and become worthy of divine grace." Thus they remained fixed to whatever helped them in achieving their goal and all else they either took lightly or dismissed altogether as unwanted, focusing their attention on such matters as fostered their inner life, their Ātman.

In approaching questions of religion there must be a certain humility on our part. Our people in the past were humble enough not to question everything, nor were they inclined to inquire into every subject like research scholars. They had a disciplined approach to their religion based on a recognition of their own level of understanding. Thus they did not dismiss a concept as wrong only because certain descriptions relating to it appeared not proper to them and at the same time they did not go deeply into what did not seem wrong to them. They too read such [erotic] descriptions; they too saw such [erotic] sculptures, but they did so in passing, because their real interest was in things that helped to make them pure inwardly. If the gods seemed to be swayed by sensual passions and anger, they knew that they (the gods) existed on a plane different from that of ordinary mortals. So they did not take the trouble of finding out the real meaning of their moods and actions in a conceptual sense, nor did they, in the manner of research scholars, worry about their poetic "value".

All these millennia our people have followed the tradition of listening to the narration of Purāṇas, of singing devotional hymns, of reciting the *Tevaram*[8] and the *Divya-prabandham*[8], of worshipping in temples, but all this has not in the least caused improper thoughts, feelings or urges in their minds. There are devotees and connoisseurs of poetry and of the arts who make a deep study of literary passages (as mentioned above) and artistic creations like sculptures to discover their inner meaning and the symbols contained in them, but ordinary people in the past did not go deep into things like them and they took them "lightly" since they were concerned mainly with their goal of achieving inner purity.

Take the case of a doctor. In examining a patient thoroughly he has to see all parts of his or her body. His only concern then is with the patient's health: thus he has a high purpose in examining his patient. He examines even his stools in the laboratory. Wearing spotlessly white dress and observing strict rules of hygiene, he tests "all sorts of things" of even a cholera patient. He asks us not to go close to a patient suffering from an infectious or contagious disease but he himself examines under the microscope the bacteria or viruses, as the case may be, that have caused the disease the patient concerned is suffering from. Can we do all the things that he does? Or can we say that the things he does are improper and that he must not do them? Or that the science of medicine must not deal with such things?

The same good sense prevailed among our people in dealing with religious themes (as in viewing the conduct of doctors treating ailing people). Things went on smoothly then. Since our country was like a plot of land properly divided with ridges[1], it flourished and won fame that was unparalleled in the world.

Now things have unfortunately changed with the establishment of printing presses. Anyone can write books on any subject and any number of copies can be printed of the same. Śāstras that have to be preserved as a secret, as a mystery [that is not to be revealed to the undeserving], are now available in print and are distributed among people, with no thought as to their degree of maturity. The practice of interpreting such śāstras wrongly, in any manner as one fancies, has become widespread. People in general have lost their sense of discipline and humility; they feel that, as free citizens, they can hold any view they like about these texts. With the result that each man interprets them according to his whims. This has led to "artha" becoming "anartha".

Those who write or publish books on our religious texts have no first-hand experience of the truths contained in them, nor do they practise the way of life prescribed in them. Writing books or publishing them is just their occupation, their trade. The majority of those who buy such books do not read them with any intention of following the teachings contained in them. Or it is just out of curiosity that they buy the books—-or it may be their purpose is to find material for a thesis they wish to write, or to write a book themselves. People who write on the śāstras and teach them—-and people who read what they write and learn —-neither have the required maturity nor the right attitude towards traditional religious texts. How can there be, then, any inner benefit flowing from such an exercise? First there are mistakes in what is written on the śāstras and in how they are learned: the teaching imparted and the teaching received are both faulty since, in a majority of cases, the rules pertaining to them are not observed.

There are two major unfortunate developments today. On the one hand, people who have, from generation to generation, been upāsakas[g] in a particular system and are entitled to be so have abandoned their upāsanā[g] and have taken to a purely worldly life; and, on the other, some have become upāsakas without being qualified to be so and without observing the required rules. Anybody today can be engaged in any type of religious service, which means he who ought to do upāsanā does not do it and he who ought not to do it does it. Of the two which trend is the more undesirable?

Today people not only write books and "research articles" but also give lectures to present a wrong view of the concepts and symbols dealt with in our religious literature. In fact, they write or speak whatever comes to their mind. What is the impact of their ideas? Among those who believe that they have faith in our religion and who take pride in it, there are many who want our religion to be purged of certain elements in order to make it "pure". What are these according to them? These are not only Kāpālikam and decadent left-hand tantra (vamācāra) but also certain aspects of worship adopted even by the virtuous. Their view seems to be preferable to what another set of people think of our religion. They do not try to frighten us by pointing to any "revolting", "obscene" or "cruel" elements in our religion. They believe that there is much in our śāstras to support the view that our religion is based on nature. So, according to them, we may in our pursuit of realism write any kind of story or article, or shoot any kind of film. There is a third school which has no respect for religion. It ignores the mountains and mountains of good things in our śāstras and Purāṇas, seeks out certain elements which seem undesirable to it, magnifies them under its microscope and proclaims that religion itself is "rubbish" and propagates atheism.

All these unfortunate developments are the consequence of the present trend of "democratising" everything without any sense of discrimination. How can it be set right? Will it be set right if I speak about it? It is doubtful if such an exercise on my part will be fruitful. I would be merely giving room to the accusation that the "Śaṅkarācāri" is raising a cry because he has a vested interest to protect. However, after having started to speak about the *Saundaryalaharī*, I thought I would be guilty of a lapse if I did not mention the precautions to be taken in popularising a hymn like it which contains things that should be kept as a secret, as a mystery.

It is not that only those who are initiated into Śrīvidyā tantra who can read hymns like the *Saundaryalaharī* which contains ideas that are to be guarded as a secret. There is nothing wrong in everyone reading the hymn as a devotional work with the resolve, "Through this hymn may we be enabled to fix our minds on Ambā for a few moments at least." It is with the common people in mind that a śāstra has been given the form of a hymn. Through such hymns, which are pregnant with concepts and truths contained in the śāstras, the common people will at least come to know of the existence of certain religious systems, and this is one of their purposes. It would be sufficient for them to know that there exist such religious disciplines and that it is not necessary for them to go deep into them. Nor do they need to try to understand the esoteric doctrines they contain. Even if you do not understand the meaning of such hymns, they will do good to you, to all mankind, by the māntrik potency of the sounds of the stanzas constituting them. Generally speaking, any hymn will do us good if it is recited in a spirit of devotion.

A stotra, or a hymn, is not merely sound and words. Its author must have composed it with the high purpose that everybody must benefit by reciting it; so it is imbued with the spirit of his very life. The hymn, which is a living entity, will definitely do good to its readers. And it goes without saying that the deity that is hymned will also reward them with his/her grace. Indeed it is the deity that ultimately brings rewards to those who read the hymn. The life-force of the author of the hymn will speak to the deity on our behalf to grant us the fruits of our devotion. In due course, the devotee, as he keeps reading the hymn, will receive the blessings of the deity and will eventually be encouraged to study the śāstra dealt with in the hymn after receiving proper initiation from a guru. It is then, and only then, can he, through his guru, grasp the hidden meaning of the stanzas, the secret embedded in them. During a public discourse it is not proper to explain passages with hidden meanings.

What is called a rahasya, a secret or a mystery, applies not only to a metaphor or a symbol standing for a concept. I have omitted to speak to you about an important subject. I have been referring only to conceptual metaphors or symbols as rahasyas. There is another—and it pertains to mantra śāstra. Since conceptual metaphors will be given an impure meaning by the immature they must not be revealed to all. There is another matter which will not be regarded as unclean but which is full of potency. So it too must be kept as a secret from the immature and imparted only to the deserving. Everybody cannot keep a revolver. There is a law that one must have a licence to possess the weapon. Mantras, the letters or syllables constituting them, must be protected as a mystery. Concepts that are likely to be misinterpreted as impure are very few in the *Saundaryalaharī* but it abounds in subjects relating to mantra and tantra. I am happy I am reminded of it at least now.

Note

[1] Divided into segments of society that were interlinked.

Chapter 33

Kuṇḍalinī Yoga

Great Caution Needed

There is another subject that too must be kept as a mystery without being revealed to all and sundry. Even to mention its name would be as good as revealing it. So I had all this while refrained from speaking about it but I shall now touch upon the subject briefly. Yes, I am touching upon the subject to warn you that none of you must touch it! Even if I don't wish to speak about it, it is very much in the air—-everybody is talking about it, I mean "Kuṇḍalinī". The names of the cakras[g] (wheels, centres, lotuses) connected with it are now well known. They crop up in the *Saundaryalaharī*. When you read the hymn you will come across the names of the cakras. So even if I don't deal with them you will try to find out about them from books. So I thought I would speak about the subject myself, speak to you about why I am not going to speak about it.

Just as every tiny atom is packed with immense power, so every individual contains in himself the Parabrahma-Śakti in the form of the Kuṇḍalinī-śakti. In people like us it lies in a sleeping state. If we practise yoga—underline the words *"if we practise yoga"*—it will awake little by little and, rising through certain cakras, become fully awake in the end as Parāśakti. Then Parāśakti will unite with Paraśiva, that is the individual Self will become united with the Brahman. This, in essence, is the subject of Kuṇḍalinī yoga. It is enough if you know this—-if you know so much.

Being born in this land, must we not know at least the A B C of our śāstras, of our sciences, the ways of worship prevalent in it? That is why I told you that there is a śāstra called Kuṇḍalinī yoga. It is enough if you know so much. You don't need to know more.

The reason. Not even one in a thousand among us, no, not even one in a hundred thousand, or one in a million among us, will be able to do the sādhana in the proper manner of Kuṇḍalinī yoga. Even among such people there may be only one or two rare individuals who will achieve success in the yoga. It is as the Lord says in the Gītā[1], "Yatatāmapi ... kaścin". That is why I laid stress on the words, "if we practise"; but practice seems impossible. To mingle this little power that is the individual Self with the great power that is the Paramātman, of the individual Self blossoming into the great power, is not something that happens easily.

Parāśakti has made it more difficult for the individual Self to dissolve in Śakti than for it to dissolve in serenity to become the Parabrahman.

There are people who follow the path of devotion and there are those who follow the path of jñāna. Ambā has both by her side and she makes them witness her dance of power. Not only that, she imparts them a little bit of that power and makes them instrumental in conferring her grace on the world. However, neither devotees nor jñānins desire power on their own. The devotee longs for love, the bliss of love, while the jñānin longs for tranquillity that is boundless. Ambā shows them her power, as if telling them, "See the splendour of my power." She grants them this power in small measure with a view to creating the well-being of the world. But the yogin is different. He practises Kuṇḍalinī yoga with the deliberate intent of obtaining power. But Ambā does not respond to his efforts easily. She seems to haggle over the price the yogin has to pay for it. And when she relents, she reveals only a wee bit of her power and that too through some nook or cranny.

Today many people give initiation into Kuṇḍalinī yoga, and many receive it. And many also claim that the dormant Kuṇḍalinī has awakened in them. But what they claim is nothing but the power of Ambā revealed through some nook or cranny. It is not Śakti revealed in all her glory, like the radiance of the rising sun. If, generally, the life-force in all of us is asleep more than three quarters, in those who practise this yoga, the Kuṇḍalinī may be awake a little more than in us. Even practitioners whose Kuṇḍalinī has awakened only to a tiny extent will experience a vibration in the crown of their head and a concentration of power between their eyebrows. This does not mean that their Kuṇḍalinī is fully aroused in them or that she has reached her goal of the highest cakra. As a matter of fact what happens is that a little power rises and then descends. As the Kuṇḍalinī ascends there is a manifestation of her power and the practitioner gains some siddhis, some amazing powers. It is Kuṇḍalinī herself who confers such powers on the practitioner so as to distract him from his ultimate quest of perfection, of liberation. Apart from this it must also be borne in mind that, if the Kuṇḍalinī deviates from her right path, the results can be disastrous: afflictions can be caused, even mental disturbance.

There are many kinds of Māyā in this world, and there are many kinds of practices, disciplines, to free ourselves from the same [Māyā]. Kuṇḍalinī yoga enables one to grasp the power of Ambā, but she has mixed in it a great deal of Māyā. If you ask why, how do we answer it? One crop is easy to cultivate and harvest. Another is difficult to cultivate : you have to find the soil suitable to it; there must be the right climate for it to grow... Why should it be so? Can we answer such a question? All this is part of the many ways in which Ambā enacts the drama of her sport. She has kept the practice of Kuṇḍalinī yoga very hard indeed.

It may be asked: "Do those who follow the path of devotion or jñāna achieve their goal and have a vision of the deity they worship or realise the Self easily?" The question is justified. But the sādhana adhered to by the followers of the paths of devotion or jñāna is not as difficult or as complicated as Kuṇḍalinī yoga. Also, unlike in Kuṇḍalinī yoga, any errors committed in the pursuit of devotion or jñāna do not lead to adverse consequences. What the Lord says in the Gītā about karmayoga [carrying out one's duties and deeds without desiring the fruits thereof] applies to bhaktiyoga and jñānayoga, but not to what is understood by the very word yoga, that is Kuṇḍalinī and the like. The Lord says:

Nehābhikrama-nāśosti pratyavāyo na vidyate
Svalpam apyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt"
— Bhagavadgītā, 2.40.

The stanza means: "Efforts made in this way (bhakti and jñāna) will never be futile. Also they will not lead to adverse consequences. Even a little effort will guard us against the terrible fear that we will never have release from worldly existence." But we see that those who are engaged in the difficult sādhana of Kuṇḍalinī yoga with all its pitfalls abandon it after reaching one stage or another despairing that they will never succeed in it. Many people practising this yoga have come to me to tell me about how they despaired of succeeding in it. It means that what the Lord has said about it does happen: "abhikrama nāśa", our endeavour becoming futile. In Kuṇḍalinī yoga the practitioner runs the risk of "pratyavāya", as mentioned in the stanza of the Gītā quoted above, that is adverse consequences, the opposite of what is intended. Till the very end he will be gripped by the fear of whether he will do his sādhana properly and be rewarded or whether he will go astray from the right path. In the midst of it all he may acquire certain amazing powers: this also causes the fear whether, as a result, he will be distracted from his true goal of liberation. "Even a little sādhana will dispel fear," these words of the Lord do not apply to the practice of Kuṇḍalinī yoga.

We must also add to this a point that the Lord does not mention in the above stanza. Apart from the fact that the practitioner of Kuṇḍalinī yoga will have the fear whether he will succeed in his sādhana, he is likely to be deluded into thinking that he has achieved perfection and won the ultimate fruit of his efforts when he earns only a little benefit in the form of certain powers. Those who follow the path of bhakti or jñāna cannot be deluded into thinking that they have come face to face with the deity they are worshipping or that they have achieved Self-realisation. But practitioners of Kuṇḍalinī yoga are misled into believing that they have reached their goal when they are far from it: they mistake the vibrations they feel in a few cakras of the body for the Kuṇḍalinī having awakened fully. It is like believing that one has reached the sanctum sanctorum of a temple when one sees the outline of the gopuram from a distance.

I do not decry Kuṇḍalinī yoga as a wrong path. It is certainly an excellent road to take one to non-dualistic samādhi. Or else great yogins and great seers would not have given us a śāstra like it. Above all, would our Ācārya have dealt with it in his hymn? The path is indeed right. But we are not sufficiently qualified to follow it. Only rare individuals of courage can practise this yoga. But there is no need for us to do the same. I make these remarks because I thought I should not speak in vain about a discipline which must be practised under a guru who has perfected himself in it — and it must be practised untiringly under his constant guidance.

Why are we assembled here? To think about the way we must follow to make all the efforts it is possible for us to make to find the Truth. Why should we, then, waste our time by speaking about efforts we are not capable of making? Not only are such efforts not possible to make, it is also not necessary to make them. There is no inward fullness to be gained by us through Kuṇḍalinī yoga that we cannot achieve through devotion and jñāna. So let us not discuss a method that is not only difficult but also unnecessary. If someone asks you the way to go to Kāñcīpuram[2], it is all right to tell him, "Take a bus from Broadway or take a train from Beach." But is there any sense in telling the man, "There is a tunnel excavated during the reign of the Pallavas connecting Tiruvoṟṟiyūr with Kāñcīpuram. You may go by it." There may in fact be such a way... There may be a tunnel and there may be people daring enough to go by it. But what is the use of speaking to ordinary people about it?

Sir John Woodroffe[3] wrote books like *Serpent Power* on Kuṇḍalinī yoga and what happened? A large number of individuals, claiming to have mastered the yoga, conducted classes. Many, without having had any practice in it and without any intention of practising it, wrote about "mūlādhāra", "sahasrāra" and so on. Among the ordinary people quite a few have come to mouth these words to show that they too are knowledgeable about the subject. Although everybody speaks about cakras, Kuṇḍalinī and so on, how many practise the yoga properly, with the required discipline and determination? Those who claim to do it, do they have the courage, the strength and the maturity to withstand the great power that will be released? It is a big question whether they can keep up their sādhana until the end without being distracted. To speak about such matters without serving any purpose is bunkum. Worse, by practising the yoga wrongly one suffers adverse consequences like hallucinations. That is why I am averse to dealing with the subject. However, since I started with the promise of explaining the stanzas of the *Saundaryalaharī* I cannot altogether conceal it from you. Even if I did, you might try to know about it from other sources. That is the reason why I am speaking about it, departing from my original stand. And I am doing so with a warning...

I do not blame Woodroffe. I am in fact thankful to him. "'Yogic power', 'yogic attainments', all these are a lie. There is nothing in the world beyond the understanding of our science," so Westerners had said and Indians who treated their word as the sacred truth agreed. It was Woodroffe who affirmed that such powers and attainments did exist, that they transcended the laws of science, that they indeed constituted a super-science. This opened the eyes of everybody to the system. Had he not written about Kuṇḍalinī yoga even those who were really entitled to practise it would not have even known about it. It had declined to such an extent then. It was only because of the faith inspired in it by the writings of Woodroffe that many were encouraged to learn the yoga from yogins who had truly mastered it.. A new bright age dawned then for a system that had become dim. Even today there are yogins who are accomplished adepts; also there are practitioners who learn from them in the proper manner. But there are charlatans too. I spoke about the new bright age that had dawned for the system. But the brightness is all in mere talk—-and it hurts. It was in the context of such developments that I said: "Why should we waste our time speaking about a system of yoga we are not practising, instead of using it in seeking Ātmic well-being?"

I wonder whether what I have spoken so far about Kuṇḍalinī yoga has aroused the interest of some of you in it. I must therefore warn you again: "You must find a good guru who is truly an adept, who has no gains to make for himself, who takes the utmost care of his disciples and who takes them higher and higher in sādhana. You must be assured that you have such a guru, a sadguru, if you want to practise Kauṇḍalinī yoga. You must not try to practise it on your own, nor under such men as those who call themselves yogins—-and such persons are to be seen everywhere nowadays. This is a matter that requires the utmost caution."

Caution is necessary with regard to mantra yoga also, though not to the same extent as it is with regard to the practice of Kuṇḍalinī yoga. Mantra yoga produces the same results as Kuṇḍalinī yoga and it does so through vibrations in the nāḍis. Initiation by a guru—-his upadeśa—is vital for one who wishes to practise it. For these reasons mantra śāstra is not to be dealt with in detail except for those who are serious about it and are determined to practise it with faith.

There is no use knowing mantras if they have not been taught in the proper manner by a guru. You may have lengths of wire in your house of good quality, also switches and bulbs. But will the bulbs burn if they are not connected to the powerhouse. The power of the guru is similar—it is a live power. Chanting mantras without the one who chants them being connected to the guru (without being initiated by him) is the same.

It does not matter much if mantras do not yield any benefits. But if they have not been properly grasped, if their potency has not been well understood? They will then produce results contrary to the expected. I will explain it by modifying the illustration given earlier. Assume that the sounds of the mantras are like electricity. Can we "handle" it (electric power) ourselves to bring light? If we do so we will get a shock. The teaching called the bulb [the light in it] must come through the wire called the guru. Only then will we obtain light. We do not know the source of the electric power which is transmitted by the wire. Similarly, the mantras also must be learned in secret.

References

[1] Ṃanūṣyāṇāṁ sahasreṣu kaścid yatati siddhaye
Yatatāmapi siddhānām kaścin mām vetti tattvataḥ
— *Bhagavadgītā*, 7.3.

[2] This discourse was delivered in Maḍrās (Chennai).

[3] Sir John Woodroffe was an eminent jurist and Tagore professor of Calcutta University. He adopted the pseudonym of Arthur Avalon and his pioneering works on Tantra were published in the early decades of the 20th century.

Chapter 34

Explaining the Hymn before a Public Assembly

During discourses given before a public assembly these subjects (Kuṇḍalinī yoga, mantra yoga) must not be elaborated upon but merely hinted at.

There must be two editions of the hymn: the first a popular edition, omitting matters considered a secret (rahasya); the second, a limited edition, meant for practitioners of Kuṇḍalinī yoga or of mantra yoga, and those who buy or receive copies must be authorised to do so by men of distinction.

This is the age of democracy. It is now widely believed that all subjects, without any distinction, must be brought to the market-place. So I wonder whether my suggestion (of two editions of the hymn) will take root [will be acceptable]. However, since I carry the title of guru it is my duty to make the suggestion and I have made it. Since I can sow the seed I have sown it. It is not in my hands to make it strike root.

The elements of a śāstra guarded as a secret are to be taught only to sincere upāsakas[8]. Similarly, certain descriptions, certain erotic passages, portraying the nāyaka-nāyakī (hero-heroine) relationship must be addressed only to "sahṛdayas"[1], connoisseurs of poetry, of literature. These must not be dwelt upon indiscriminately before a general audience.

However, to ignore or omit altogether references to concepts pertaining to certain disciplines while explaining the stanzas of works like the *Saundaryalaharī* or to ignore passages of poetic beauty dealing with the husband-wife relationship is to take too narrow a view of things. It would mean overlooking profound philosophical truths and poetic ideas and images of great beauty. However, great caution is needed in dwelling on these and one must not go beyond a certain point in revealing their content. Certain passages, superficially read, may seem to be too erotic in flavour or even capable of causing disgust, disagreeable feelings, but they may not be so when examined in depth. Such passages may be explained to an audience without going too much into knotty religious concepts or figures of speech of a difficult nature. When explaining the meaning of stanzas dealing with Kuṇḍalinī yoga one may refer to those parts which inspire devotion to Ambā or contain beautiful descriptions but one must be silent on the points that are to be preserved as a mystery.

When we explain the meaning of the stanzas of the *Saundaryalaharī* can we avoid references to basic matters like its deity Ambā seated on the Pañcabrahmāsana? "What, sitting on a throne made up of five persons?" it might be asked. Also the five persons [deities] are referred to as five "pretas" (corpses). Can we avoid speaking about such matters? We must point out that there is nothing improper about the Pañcabrahmāsana, nothing to arouse disgust, and explain its inner significance[2].

The Ācārya speaks beautifully about the greatness of Ambā's feet. "Do you know what it is, the sacred water laving those feet? It is indeed the Gaṅgā that adorns the head of Īśvara himself," so he observes. As we meditate on Ambā we must imagine that her feet are placed on our head and that the Gaṅgā resting at them flows into us, into our inner being, and washes away all our sins, all the dirt of our actions, and makes us pure. It is with this idea in mind, that is of pointing a way to purify ourselves, that the Ācārya has expressed himself so beautifully in portraying the feet of Ambā. Describing the quarrel between lovers is part of the poetic convention in the treatment of the nāyaka-nāyakī relationship and we find the same implied, if not openly stated, in this stanza. The nāyaka, Śiva, falls at the feet of his nāyakī, Ambā, to pacify her after a quarrel. It is now, as Śiva falls at Ambā's feet, that the Gaṅgā on his head becomes the sacred water laving her feet. So much is implied in the stanza. Without mentioning all this how can we explain the verse, referring only to how Gaṅgāmṛta becomes the caraṇāmṛta of Ambā [ambrosia of her feet] and how it splashes coolly into our inner being and cleanses it? It is thus that we have to speak about Śiva falling at the feet of Ambā. But, in doing so, care must be taken to interpret it in such a way that the immature do not understand it in any perverse sense. The thing we must do is to ask people to draw a lesson from this about what desire has done even to such a one as Śiva. "We must be warned against an evil like it," this is the message we must try to convey.

The devotee, the poet and the jester are licensed to speak freely. A jester can make fun of his king and queen openly, right in the royal assembly. The devotee and the poet can take liberties with the Lord. A poet who is also a devotee—-the Ācārya here was one such—-can, in an attitude of devotion and from the poetic angle, say things that we must not say or we are reluctant to say: it is so because of the freedom enjoyed by him from time immemorial in a civilized society like ours. If we are humble and try to understand what they say with an open mind and in the spirit of a connoisseur, we will be able to accept it as right and be happy about it. They, the devotee and the poet, speak ill of a god when they mean to praise him [this is called "nindāstuti"], make fun of him, create differences between a god and his consort, depicting one as being superior or inferior to the other, and incite quarrels between them. All this must not be taken amiss by us even if we do not appreciate the same. We must at least accept that from their point of view what they do is right.

The reason why I say all this is that the very first stanza of the hymn will seem strange to those who do not have sahṛdaya-bhāva[8] towards its author.

[The Mahāsvāmī asks the audience if there is a word by which the meaning of "sahṛdaya" could be made clear to people. The word "rapport" is suggested by one member of the audience. "It is a good word but everybody may not understand it," says the Mahāsvāmī. Another member of the audience suggests *"mana iṇakkam*[3]*"* and the Svāmī is happy about it but says that *"manobhāva iṇakkam*[4]*"* would be still better.]

"Śiva is the husband, Ambā is the wife. It is by her power that he is activated," says the first stanza of the hymn. This means it is the wife that controls the husband, that the Lord himself has come under the sway of his wife. If she is not associated with him he will be "useless". This [such an interpretation] does not seem right. "Should the Lord be lowered in this manner simply because Ambā is to be exalted at the beginning itself?" Those who are lacking in sahṛdayatvam are likely to take such a distorted view. It is because I wanted them not to do so that I spoke about how things said in expounding certain concepts or descriptions dictated by poetic imagination are to be taken by the reader.

What is the meaning of the concept here (of the first stanza)? The quiescent Brahman, without any function, is activated by the power of cit. I told you that for one to have awareness of oneself, to know oneself as "I", is also a function. Since according to the poetic convention also the nāyaka is submissive to the nāyakī, we must accept the view that Śiva is activated by Ambā.

Apart from the explanations offered on these two planes, if the Śiva-Śakti principle is interpreted on the basis of science it would sound more convincing to people.

Notes & References

[1] Literally, "sahṛdaya" is one with a heart. He is a rasika. See the paragraph in the same chapter appearing in square brackets.

[2] This concept is explained in Chapter 24.

[3] & [4] *Iṇakkam* is a Tamiḷ word meaning mental agreement, "compatibility".

Chapter 35

The Śākta System and Science

Let us examine on the basis of science the statement that the quiescent Śiva is activated and involved in work by Ambā... ''Padārtha'' or ''''substance'' is called ''matter''. Its character or nature is inertness, that is it is without the power of action or motion. We often come across the phrase "inert matter''. We know that the cosmos has come into being by inert matter set in motion in various ways and occurring in various combinations. Does this not mean that there is a certain power that activates matter that is inert? Matter that is inert is Śiva and the power that activates it is Śakti.

Śiva, who is quiescent and motionless, and Śakti that keeps everything pulsating, from the planets and stars to the atom, are inseparably united. In terms of science Śiva can be called matter and Śakti energy. Not only are Śiva and Śakti inseparably united they are in fact basically the same. This is confirmed by atomic science according to which matter becomes energy.

But there is a difference, a big difference. According to science, matter will cease to exist after it is converted into energy. But Śiva and Śakti exist as eternal truths. When Śakti is manifested as energy, the matter that is Śiva is not annihilated. This is so because matter here is not insentient but a living spirit; it remains as the Ātman that is not destroyed, that cannot be destroyed. Indeed it exists as a living force, as caitanya. Even the matter that science speaks of, matter that is inert to start with and ends in inertness, is born out of this caitanya. Today geniuses in science like Einstein,[1], Sir Oliver Lodge[2], Sir Arthur Eddington[3] are gradually turning science towards caitanya, viewing it from the basis of caitanya. But this cannot be proved or experienced in the laboratory. It can be proved or experienced only through religious practice and observances.

While there are differences between science and religion, there are many points on which the two agree. The discoveries made in nuclear science arising out of Einstein's Theory of Relativity come close particularly to the ideas propounded by Advaita Vedānta and the Śākta system.

Nothing in the world exists as a truth on its own, as an absolute entity; this applies to time and space also. Everything is dependent on something else and all are part of a continuum, though each appears as a truth by itself in the empirical world. This is what I understand of the Theory of Relativity. The Brahman is the one fundamental Truth. According to Advaita all the world is based on it, as its reflection, manifested by Māyā. I said that the Śākta texts spoke of this Māyā as Ambā. Is there not room to think that the concept of Māyā is the same as the Theory of Relativity? Science has not discovered the truth that is Absolute. Religious and philosophical texts call the Absolute the Brahman, Śiva. (Though religion and philosophy are regarded as two separate disciplines, for us the two are inseparable: they are like Śiva and Śakti.) This Absolute is not something to be found only in books; it is a truth that is realised by great men as the Ātman. It is the life of all life, indeed the only true Life.

Science has not spoken of this Absolute yet. Even if one day scientists come to accept this truth on a theoretical basis, they will have to admit that the proof of the same is beyond their capacity. They will have to tell people, "Go and learn about it from the science of the Ātman". Science can only partly explain the drama enacted by Parāśakti through her vibrations or motions and derive rules from it. It cannot have a unified view of these vibrations, all those vibrations that keep the mind of the individual Self pulsating and show the way to keep it still and tranquil and realise itself as the Absolute. Anyway, this is not the aim of science, to point the way to Self-realisation. That way will be shown by religious texts. But, even if they do so, even if we advance by this way, it is Ambā who will keep the ultimate goal open for us. She it is who separates us from the Absolute in her sport; that being so who else can again unite us with It?

It is wrong on our part to speak about the failure of science to understand things beyond its frontiers. At the same time, scientists themselves must realise that there are limitations to science. They are also not justified in saying that the disciplines dealing with things beyond it, that is beyond science, are false. Both sides (science and religion) must believe that the two are complementary, that the one compensates for what is lacking in the other. If we examine how the truths discovered by science are expressed in a different language in some of the concepts propounded by our śāstras we will come across many an interesting fact.

For example, we may take it that the positively charged proton in the nucleus of the atom is Śiva and that the negatively charged electron is Ambā. The point at which the weight of an object is kept even on its two sides, maintained in equilibrium, is to be known as one of tranquillity. It is the centre of gravity. Even a terrible storm has a centre, "storm centre". It is from a calm centre that power emanates and spreads, that power manifests itself or even explodes—-and matter, objects, are created and functions are performed with force. This calm centre is Śiva and the entity that emanates from the centre and revolves round it is Ambā.

What is at the centre of a thing is positive and what revolves round it is negative: the two are Śiva and Ambā. Since it is not stated that the two are equal or that they function together, there is another way in which Śiva and Ambā are looked at. That is instead of saying that Śiva is at the centre and Ambā revolves round him, the two are said to be half and half of the same entity. That is Ardhanārīśvara—-the right side that is positive is Śiva and the left side that is negative is Ambā. There is an important reason for saying so. Is not the heart in the left side? It is what gives strength to the entire body. If it does not function properly the right side also will not function well. "Na khalu spanditumapi" (it will not be able even to stir).

There is something interesting about this. The heart is in the left side and it gives strength to the entire body. But it is the right side that is stronger; it has more "power" to do work. The right hand lends itself to greater use than the left one. Children amuse themselves with what is called *nondi-play* (literally "lame play") in which the left leg is kept raised and the right leg supports the body. There is a song which says that the left leg not being useful Naṭarāja supports himself with his right leg[4].

An idea is implied here: that it is Ambā who gives strength to the body. If we see what controls the functions of the right and left sides of the body, we will see that the functions of the right side are controlled by the left side of the brain and those of the left side of the body by the right side of the brain. That means the "Śiva side" of our body which performs functions with greater power is controlled by the Śakti side of the brain.

In this Ambā's pātivratya[4] is beautifully revealed. Although it is she who imparts power to her husband, she shows him to be stronger. His dance of deluge (pralaya tāṇḍava) makes all the cosmos tremble—it has such awesome power. Such force is revealed not only in the dance of deluge; Śiva's dance of bliss (ānanda tāndava) is such as to make all the eight cardinal points of space tremble and shake, so says Gopālakṛṣṇa Bhāratī[5] in one of his compositions. Such power is demonstrated not only by Śiva's action. If he beats the earth with his matted locks, a Vīrabhadra will arise.... Listening to the accounts of his deeds in the Purāṇas we still tremble with fear. With one blow of his hand he can knock out the teeth of even the Sun God. If Parameśvara so much as laughs once, more power will be released than the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and it can reduce the Tripuras to ashes. It is Ambikā who imparts such power to her husband.

"Śakti is the name of a female deity. It is therefore outrageous that women should be called 'abalās' and suppressed by men." Those who think so must consider this. The śāstras, according to which Śakti is feminine, also have it that Parāśakti has on her own come under the sway of Parameśvara and that she shows by her example that such submissiveness to the husband is what lends added beauty to women. It must also be noted that the śāstras do not say that Parāśakti gave Parameśvara more power in order to keep her under his control. This is seen illustrated at Cidaṁbaram (at the Naṭarāja temple). As said before, pañcakṛtya is under the control of Ambā. But here [at Cidaṁbaram] she has assigned it to Naṭarāja and she herself remains utterly serene, without our knowing where she is.

I said that Śakti dwelt in the same body as that of Śiva; he, her husband, is in the right side and she herself is in the left side. But being there she gives greater strength to the right side. The right side is called "daksiṇa bhāga" and the left side "vāma bhāga". "Dakṣiṇa" means "skilful", "able" and the term is apt for the right side. "Vāma" means beautiful". It is on this theme, that the essential characteristic of Ambā is her beauty, that the Ācārya has composed his *Saundaryalaharī.* And, appropriately enough, hers is the left side which mainly denotes beauty. She is called Śakti but she has made her husband more powerful remaining herself more beautiful than anyone, or anything, else.

Śiva is still and Śakti is the one who activates him. But an idea contrary to this is conveyed by the Sanskrit words "dakṣiṇa" and "vāma" denoting the right side that is his and the left side that is hers. But the Tamiḷ and English equivalents of "right" and "left" are totally at variance with the idea that Śiva, associated with the right side, is still and quiescent and that Ambā, associated with the left, is the one who activates him. "Right" and "left" in Tamiḷ are "*valam"* and *"iḍam"*.

"*Valam*" is derived from "balam" (strength). *"Iḍam*" is place (where a person or thing stands), "station". The word "stationary" itself means "not moving". In English these meanings are taken one step further. It is said that the root from which "left" is derived means "paralysis". "Left" denotes weakness; "right" means the same as "straight", "perpendicular" This meaning becomes clear in the term "right angle". Only when he is strong can a man stand upright. When he is weak he lies crouching or he develops a stoop. When yogic postures are taught in order to strengthen the body and the mind, the first lesson is "Uthānāsana", the erect posture. So the idea that "right" is strong and "left" is weak and unmoving is at variance with the Śiva-Śakti concept according to which Śiva is assigned the right side and Śakti the left side. It seems to suggest that Ambā, the great pativratā that she is, has transferred all her power to Śiva and, remaining without any action herself, has gone to her husband for refuge.

Though the root meanings of "left" and "right" are as described above, in politics they seem to have different connotations. Leftist parties stand for change, for revolution, while rightists are called conservatives who adhere to the path of peace. Here the right side represents the tranquillity of Śiva while the left side represents the throbbing, the pulsation, of Śakti. The meanings in the context of politics are very apt.

I have brought in politics along with philosophy, poetics and science; it is only by having recourse to different ways of explanation that the meaning of a subject, the idea behind it, will make a deep impact on the mind.

Another point to be noted on this subject of left and right is this. The right side of an object becomes the left side of its reflected image: similarly the left side becomes its right side. According to Advaita the Nirguṇa Brahman[g], as it is reflected in the Māyā mirror, becomes the Saguṇa Brahman[g] that rules the dualistic world. Which means it is Śiva himself who becomes Ambā as he is reflected in the Māyā mirror. Do not ask questions about this Māyā, because it is not possible at all to say what it is. After all, it creates magic, creates illusions. How can we comprehend it? According to the Śākta system, Māyā is Ambā, an aspect of Ambā. I said earlier that in this system it is when Śiva is manifested as the individual Self that Māyā appears. It is Māyā that keeps the individual Self under a daze without its being aware that it is indeed Śiva. The function of Māyā, Māyā-Śakti, is to conceal the eternal and real entity that is Śiva and reveal the transient and non-real objects as real to the individual Self.

Here the object and its reflected image again lead us to the subject of the positive and the negative. The positive and negative categories mentioned before belong to electricity. Now I am going to speak about positive and negative in photography. In the positive, light will be seen as light and shade (that is what is dark) will be seen as shade (as in the original image). In the negative the light will be seen as shade and the shade will be seen as light: Here is the work of Māyā: what is real is revealed as unreal and what is unreal is revealed as real: it is all due to the nescience created by Māyā. Now we are floundering in the deep pit of darkness and since Ambā is responsible for it we call her Māyā.

But we must not forget one fact. Let me repeat what I said before. Ambā who creates the illusion that the unreal is real will one day, out of her supreme compassion, make the unreal truly unreal and unite us with the real. If we go to her as our only refuge and grasp her feet, I mean mentally, without ever relaxing our hold, and pray for release she will surely bless us with liberation.

As I say this, there is another point that emerges in the positive-negative theme. What do the two terms mean? "Positive" means that which exists, that which is real: it denotes "Yes". Negative means that which does not exist, that which is not real. However good or attractive the sport of Śakti is, it can never be the eternal truth. So we are justified in describing her as negative. It is the tranquillity that is Śiva which is the eternal truth. So Śiva is positive. However, Ambā or Śakti, who is the basis of all that is negative, is also instrumental in uniting us with the positive.

There may be matters that are not acceptable to all but that may be made acceptable by explaining them in terms of science and philosophy or by interpreting them in accordance with poetic convention or tradition. But there are passages dealing with mantras, tantras and yantras and also certain poetic descriptions which should not be dealt with before a general audience. While explaining the meaning of a hymn like the *Saundaryalaharī* whose very purpose is to take us to a high realm it would be an offence against Ambā as well as the Ācārya if we were to dwell upon ideas that are of no use to the listeners or that cause undersirable thoughts in their minds.

Note & References

[1, 2&3] Albert Einstein, 1879-1955, the tallest among modern scientists. See Chapter 35, Part Five, *Hindu Dharma*, in which the Great Guru discusses Vedānta in the light of the Theory of Relativity. Sir Arthur Eddington, 1882-1944, distinguished astronomer. Sir Oliver Lodge, astronomer, who became a champion of "spiritualism" (communication with the dead)

[4] The reference is to a Tamiḷ composition by Pāpavināśa Mudaliār.

[5] Gopālakṛṣṇa Bhāratī is the author of an opera, *Nandanār Caritam*. The song referred to is "*Naṭanam āḍinār*", a popular item in Bharatanāṭyam recitals.

Chapter 36

The First Stanza: What It Teaches

"Without being united with you, can Śiva even stir?" so asks the Ācārya at the very beginning of his hymn. But what is the inner meaning of his statement, or the lesson it contains, or its teaching? It occurs to me that the Ācārya seems to say to Ambā on our behalf, "Without your compassion can we reach that state of stillness (of Śiva)"? Ambā is the Great Power that moves what does not move. Her sport starts with the vibration that makes the Parabrahman aware of Its own existence.

According to the first stanza, the first vibration by which the Parabrahman becomes aware of Itself is caused by Ambā. Thereafter it is vibration after vibration, movement after movement, ending with the vibrations of our own daily life. These vibrations, originating in the Brahman and ending with the world of living beings, are in a descending order ("avarohaṇa"); that is they descend step by step and are mentioned in different śāstras as 36 or 24 tattvas and so on. This avarohaṇa is called "evolution". No, it is not the evolution according to Darwin. He speaks of the species evolving into higher and higher orders. Here it is a matter of descent from the highest peak of the Brahman down to us humans. The Brahman turning outward and countless entities evolving from It: this process is called "evolution". Each individual attaining his state of the Brahman is mokṣa or liberation. Thus all those revealed outwardly from the Brahman and going inward again is ārohaṇa or ascent. From the Brahman down to the individual (or the individual Self) is "avarohaṇa" or descent; from the individual (the individual Self) to the Brahman is ārohaṇa or ascent. Ārohaṇa is the ascending order similar to the notes in music, *sa rī ga ma pa dha nī.* Avarohaṇa is in the descending order—*sa nī dha pa ma ga rī.* From the Brahman in the upper *sa* descending to *rī* is the individual Self; for the individual to obtain liberation he will have to go up to *sa* after passing through *ga ma pa dha nī.* Better than the words "descending" and "ascending", it seems to me, are "unfolding" and "folding". The Brahman, becoming outward and unfolding itself into the universe and the living beings, is evolution.

The living beings caused by the unfolding have to turn inward and become the Brahman. This process is aptly denoted by the word "involution".

What had unfolded have to fold again and end with the root base or mūlādhāra. For this process we have to exert ourselves. But that alone will not be enough. That the great entity called the Brahman has evolved into us is not something that has been accomplished by ourselves but by the sport of Ambā, her līlā. So how can we, by our efforts alone, become the Brahman again? It is true that, in the drama she conducts with individual souls, she has given us a part in which we have to undergo much trouble and exert ourselves in many ways, but that does not mean that we can by ourselves achieve liberation, attain the state of the Brahmaṇ. Through her grace alone can we reach this ultimate goal. The force that has thrust us outward, the same force has to thrust us inward. If you want the fan to work you have to switch it on. It does not stop on its own. Can anybody stop it by holding on to its blades? To stop it, it has to be switched off: the same button that you pressed to switch it on must be pressed again to switch it off.

Ambā is the cause of Śiva's evolution [into the universe and all living beings]. But there is the other side of the coin of what the Ācārya says at the very beginning of his hymn. If Ambā is the cause of the evolution of Śiva into the individual souls she must also be the cause of the involution of these souls, their becoming Śiva again. For this we must pray constantly for her compassion. We must take it that the Ācārya, through the words of his hymn, teaches us to pray for her grace to bring about our involution into Śiva.

I said that Ambā has cast us in a role in which we have to exert ourselves in various ways. What are these efforts? And how are they to be made? The different kinds of efforts include karma or works, and the paths of devotion, jñāna and yoga. Among these the Ācārya shows the easiest and happiest path, that of devotion (bhakti pārāyaṇa) through his *Saundaryalaharī*.

How do we make an inaccessible entity accessible to us? We must imagine it in a compassionate form and it will be within our reach. This attitude towards a deity is devotion or bhakti. Among the various rasas of love, among its many swetnesses, is vātsalya, the affection of a mother for her children. The Ācārya mingles vātsalya with the aesthetics of poetry in this hymn. If it is the mother who showers her love called vātsalya on all her children, there must also ba a father (to go with the mother). That is why, right at the beginning of the hymn, the Ācārya uses the words "Śivaḥ Śaktyā", thus bringing before us for our *darshan* the Mother-Father pair. In doing so he shows how exalted Ambā is by depicting her as the Mother who gives strength to the Father.

Chapter 37

Cosmic Functions with the Dust on Ambā's Feet

Tanīyāṁsam pāṁsum tava caraṇa-paṅkeruha-bhavam
Viriñciḥ sancinvan viracayati lokānavikalam
Vahatyenam śauriḥ kathamapi sahasreṇa śirasāṁ
Haraḥ samkṣudyainam bhajati bhasitoddhūlanavidhiṁ

This is the second stanza. The first stanza said: "Hari-Hara-Viriñcādibhirapi ārādhyāṁ" (Ambā who is worshipped even by Hari, Hara, Viriñca and others—-that is by Viṣnu, Rudra, Brahmā and others). This idea is elaborated here. If the Trimūrti (Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra) carry out their important functions of creation, sustenance and dissolution, they owe it to a trickle of Ambā's compassion.

It seems Brahmā creates all these worlds out of a speck of dust from the feet of Ambā. "Pāṁsu" means dust on the feet. Even in such dust there are some particles that are finer than others. The Ācārya uses the word "tanīyaṁsam" here to denote such particles of dust. When the entire Śakti of the Parabrahman assumes a form, is personified, a speck of dust on her feet is sufficient source material (root substance) to create the fourteen worlds. So much for the subject of creation.

Then protection or sustenance. Ananta or Ādiśeṣa on whom Viṣṇu reclines is himself an aspect of Viṣṇu, who is called Anantapadmanābha. He who sustains the worlds supporting them with his one thousand heads, these worlds are only a speck of dust on the sole of Ambā's foot. Here Viṣṇu is called Śauri. The deity at Tirukkaṇṇapuram (in Tamiḷ Nāḍu) is known as Śaurirāja. Kṛṣṇa Paramātman is called "Śauri" because he is the grandson (son's son) of Śūra of the Yādava clan. This name would be apt for Balarāma also. Being the elder brother of Kṛṣṇa the name is more justified in his case: he is also one of the ten avatāras of Viṣṇu, and is , besides, said to be an avatāra of Śeśa. So there is nothing wrong in describing Mahāviṣṇu as Seṣa and in saying that he supports the worlds with his one thousand heads. The very first word of the "Puruṣasūkta", which is a hymn to Puruṣottama, the Lord, means that he possesses one thousand heads, "Sahasraśīrṣā".

The direct or literal meaning of the statement that Viṣṇu supports the worlds with his heads is that he keeps them stable without their rolling away. But the inner meaning is that he sustains them, protects them. The Ācārya says that Viṣṇu performs this function "kathamapi", somehow. It is a difficult task but Viṣṇu carries it out somehow. Brahmā accomplishes the work of creation with the dust from the sole of Amba's foot. While mentioning this the Ācārya does not use the term "kathamapi". Nor does he use it when he refers to Rudra destroying the worlds. He uses the phrase only in the context of Viṣṇu sustaining them. Creation is a function that is accomplished in a brief time. Destruction takes even less time. Is it not easier to destroy a thing than to make it? But protecting the world is a task that lasts an extremely long period, yugas, even kalpas. So only in this context, of Viṣṇu supporting the worlds for eons, does the Ācārya use the phrase "kathamapi".

To carry on one's head the dust from the feet of the great is considered right and proper, indeed a matter of great good fortune. Mahāviṣṇu carries on his head the dust from the feet of Ambā, the dust that means all the fourteen worlds.

If Viṣṇu holds the dust from Ambā's feet on his head, Īśvara smears it all over his body in the form of ashes. It seems Īśvara is also included among the *Tokaiyadiyārs*[1] whom the *Periyapurāṇam*[2] refers to as "*muzhu nūru pūsīya munivar*"[3]. The dust on Ambā's feet, we saw, became the fourteen worlds. During the time of dissolution Īśvara pulverises these worlds into powder and smears the same all over his body thinking to himself, "The source of the fourteen worlds was the dust from Ambā's feet, so the fourteen worlds reduced to powder is the dust from Ambā's feet."

Ambā's feet are a bright red; so the dust on them must also be the same colour. When Vedamātā (Mother Veda) prostrates herself before Ambā, keeping her head at the goddess's feet, the red dust sticks in the parting of her (Vedamātā's) hair as kuṁkuma. This idea is conveyed by the name included in the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam,* "Śruti-sīmanta-sindūrīkṛta-pādābjadhūlikā." A speck of that kuṁkuma becomes the fourteen worlds and during the great deluge it is turned into sacred ashes (vibhūti). It is customary to offer devotees the sacred ashes as Śiva's prasāda and kuṁkuma as Ambā's prasāda. Here the kuṁkuma itself has become the sacred ashes for Īśvara.

After stating in the first stanza that the Trimūrti worship her, their functions are mentioned in this, the second stanza. So the truth is implied here that it is as a result of their worship of Ambā that the three gods have become capable of performing their functions.

Note

1, 2&3 *Tokaiyaḍiyārs* are ardent devotees. The *Periyapurāṇam* (The Great Story) is a 12th- century Tamiḷ classic by Śekkizhār that tells the story of Śaiva saints and forms the concluding part of the *Tirumurai.* This Purāṇam speaks of the devotees of Śiva who are besmeared with the holy ashes (vibhūti) from head to foot. Such devotees are referred to as *munivar* (sages) with their entire bodies besmeared with *Tirunīr* (vibhūti).

muzhu — fully (head to foot)

nīru — sacred ashes

pūśiya — besmeared with

munivar — sages

In the second stanza of the *Saundaryalaharī* Īśvara is said to smear his entire body with the dust from Ambā's feet which, though originally reddish in colour, has now turned white like vibhūti. This appearance of Śiva leads to the thought that Īśvara can be included in the list of ardent devotees *(aḍiyārs)*, the saints whose bodies are white with the sacred ashes. — A.K.

Chapter 38

Can We Start with the Feet?

The first stanza is like a "maṅgala śloka" [signifying an auspicious beginning]. The text proper, we may say, starts with the second stanza, and it is a glorification of the dust on Ambā's feet.

"Does not the portrayal of male deities start with the feet? In the case of female deities is it not customary to start the verbal depiction from the head? Why is it different here?" Such questions may arise in the minds of people.

It is only when the entire physical form of a deity is described part by part that the "pādādikeśa"[g] order is observed for a male deity and the "keśādipāda"[g] order observed for a female deity. In the "Ānandalaharī" section of the hymn there are no stanzas describing the physical form from the feet upward. It is in the latter section called "Saundaryalaharī" that we have a description of the physical form of Ambā : here the portrayal starts, according to the convention, with the crown and ends with the feet.

When there is no complete description of the physical form of a deity, male or female, the feet must be grasped first. When you go to a deity for refuge you fall at his or her feet. Initiation is given by a deity in the form of a guru by placing his or her foot on the head of the devotee. Ambā is the mother of mothers, the guru of gurus. So whether we go to her for refuge crying "Mother" or look upon her as our guru and pray for dīkṣā (initiation) we have to hold her feet. So it is proper that the hymn commences in this manner [the Ācārya, so to speak, grasping Ambā's feet].

We must also consider the fact that, if Śiva is united with Śakti, it naturally means that Śakti is also united with Śiva. Since they are one in the form of Ardhanārīśvara, describing Śiva from head to foot is also justified. The Ācārya has composed a hymn in this manner. Similarly, following the same logic, Ambā can also be described from foot to head in the same manner. Here her feet are described but there is no complete portrayal of hers. We may take it that in this way the inseparableness of Śiva and Ambā is implied.

The commencement of any subject is customarily called "*aḍi*" (it means "foot" in Tamiḷ). From this point of view also it is proper to start with Ambā's feet when speaking about her.

The next two stanzas also dwell on the glory of Ambā's feet. After dealing with the greatness of the dust on the soles of her sacred feet, the Ācārya goes on to portray the greatness of her sacred feet themselves.

Chapter 39

The Dust on Ambā's Feet

It Does Good Here and Hereafter

The third stanza mentions how the dust on the sacred feet of Ambā brings us her grace in many ways. After stating in the second stanza that it is through this dust that all cosmic functions are carried out, the Ācārya says here how it brings blessings to all living beings and how it bestows grace on us by freeing us from worldly existence.

Avidyānām antastimira-mihira-dvīpanagarī

"Avidyā" means "ajñāna" (nescience). It is a fearful kind of darkness, what is called "timira" in the stanza. The darkness of ajñāna conceals the self-luminous Ātman that is within. For ajñānins the dust on Ambā's feet sheds the light of jñāna that is like a shining city situated where the sun rises. "Mihira" means the sun and "dvīpanagarī" denotes a city on an island. When you look at the rising sun you would think it emerges from an island in the sea.

Would it not be sufficient to say that the dust on the feet of Ambā is the sun dispelling the darkness of ajñāna? Why should mention be made of the city on the island over which the sun rises? There is another version of the stanza for those who ask such a question. The relevant line is: "timiramihiroddīpanagarī" ("timira-mihira-uddīpanagarī"). "Uddīpana" is to make something brighter. If you follow this text, the meaning would be: "The sun that dispels the inner darkness of ajñāna and makes the light of jñāna brighter."

Let us consider the two terms, "saprapañca" and "niṣprapañca". The Saguṇa Brahman[g] that is associated with cosmic matters is "saprapañca". "Niṣprapañca" is the Nirguṇa Brahman[g], the Ultimate Reality, that is without the Māyā that is the cause of the prapañca or the universe. In the previous stanza Ambā was shown as the Saguṇa Brahman: the dust on her feet, it was mentioned, was the cause of creation, sustenance and destruction. In this stanza she is depicted as the Nirguṇa Brahman, the light of the sun that dispels the darkness of Māyā.

The doctrine of Advaita would repeatedly come to the Ācārya's mind, even in the midst of composing a work of devotion. He would then at once tell himself: "Am I not composing a hymn for people with a dualistic attitude? So, though it is necessary to point to the ultimate goal of Advaita here and there, I should not elaborate upon it." Thus he reduces the pitch to the dualistic level. That is how here, after speaking about dispelling the darkness of avidyā, he speaks about all those things that people hanker after in this world like intelligence and prosperity.

Avidyā grips all except the great who have awareness of the Ātman. Even people of high intelligence, "clever" people, are not free from it. After stating that the dust from the feet of Ambā takes one to great heights by banishing nescience and bestowing the light of Ātmic awareness, the Ācārya says that, as a next step, it gives to the dull-witted dualistic jñāna of a high order that illumines their intelligence.

Jaḍānām caitanya-stabaka-makaranda-srutijharī

"Jaḍānām" means "for those who are so dull-witted as to resemble inert objects", people with their knowledge or awareness dried up. In this state of theirs the dust on Ambā's feet creates a fountain of honey that splashes inside them and makes them green [as opposed to their former dryness]. "Makaranda srutijharī" means honey cascading. Honey or nectar is found in a flower, is it not? What is the flower here? "Caitanya stabakam", the bouquet of living knowledge. Caitanya is nothing but the supreme jñāna called "cit". For the dull-witted the same becomes the cluster of flowers that splashes nectar and creates the light of intelligence in them.

The term "caitanya kusumam" occurs in the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam.* "Kusumam" means "flower". In Kāḷahasti, Ambā is called "Jñānapūṅkotai" (Garland of Jnana). Caitanya is the offering of libation to Ambā. It is the flower with which she is worshipped. We have these two names for Ambā in the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam:* "Caitanyārghya-samārādhyā" and "Caitanya-kusumapriyā". Together with them occur the names, "Sadoditā" and "Taruṇāditya-pāṭalā". "She who is always bright like daybreak" is "Sadoditā"; and "she who is red like the light of the morning sun" is "Taruṇāditya-pāṭalā". The Ācārya, it is likely, has used terms like "timira-mihira-dvīpanagarī" and "caitanya-stabakam" inspired by the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam.*

If the Ācārya is reminded of the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam* in his *Saundaryalaharī*, Mūka is reminded in his *Pañcaśatī* of the words of the Ācārya himself. Mūka, in the very first stanza of his *Pañcaśatī*, calls Ambā "Paracidrūpa". That cit itself takes the form of compassion and Mūka likens it to "kāśmīra stabakam", a cluster of saffron flowers, so tender and beautiful. It is like a creeper that entwines itself round the Kāmakoṭi Pīṭha of Kāñcīpuram.

Kāraṇa-paracidrūpā kāñcīpurasīmni kāmapīṭhagatā
Kācana viharati karuṇā kāśmīra-stabaka-komalāṅgalatā

Knowledge and wealth are what people usually hanker after. After referring to the dust on the feet of Ambā that imparts the light of knowledge to people, the Ācārya speaks of the same bestowing wealth also:

Daridrāṇām cintāmaṇiguṇanikā

Cintāmaṇi, which has an aspect of the divine, grants all one's wishes. Europeans speak of the philosopher's stone but it is different and is more like our "sparśa-vedi"; when it comes into contact with an object, brass, lead or iron, it will convert it into gold [or silver]. All it can do is to transmute a metal into gold. Cintāmaṇi is different: it fulfils our desires, creates whatever we desire.

Kāmadhenu, Kalpakavṛkṣa, Cintāmaṇi—these three are wish-fulfilling. Cintāmaṇi is like stone, earth, belonging to the category of insentient objects. Kalpakavṛkṣa has elements of both categories, jaḍa and cetana (insentient and sentient), and belongs to flora. Flora take in water and grow roots and branches. Since they propagate themselves they belong to the cetana category. But, all the same, they are rooted to a place and since they do not have feelings and urges like humans and animals they also belong to the jaḍa or insentient category. Kāmadhenu is all cetana, sentient. In physical form she is a cow but in wisdom she is superior even to human beings since she exists on a divine plane. The three, Cintāmani, Kalpaka tree and Kāmadhenu belong respectively to the mineral kingdom, vegetable kingdom and animal kingdom.

The dust on the feet of Ambā is the Cintāmaṇi that grants all the wealth desired by the poor. "Cintāmaṇi-guṇanikā": "guṇanikā" means "garland".

Later in the *Saundaryalaharī* there is a reference to men who are extremely fortunate telling the beads made of Cintāmaṇi gems[1]. Their rosaries are like the ones in which rudrakṣas[2] and crystals are strung together and they keep muttering the mantras that invoke Ambā: "Bhajantitvām Cintamaṇi-guṇanibaddhākṣavalayāḥ." There is a mention of Kāmadhenu also in the stanza. The great men who perform the sacrificial rite chanting the mantras invoking Ambā do not use ordinary ghee but ghee obtained from the milk of Kāmadhenu: "Śivāgnau juhvantaḥ Surabhighṛta-dhārāhutiśataiḥ." "Surabhighṛta" is ghee obtained from the milk of Kāmadhenu, Surabhi being another name of Kāmadhenu.

A single Cintāmaṇi is enough to grant all one's wishes. Since what Ambā gives is many times more than what we ask for, the rosary is said to have been made of many Cintāmaṇis strung together.

The Ācārya refers to Kalpakavṛkṣa[3] also in one of the stanzas of the *Saundaryalaharī*[4], that too as part of the glorification of Ambā's feet. He says that like Kalpaka there are four other celestial trees that grant all one's wishes ("tarūṇām divyānām"). Pārijātā and Mandāra are two. Since Mandāra grants all the desires of the devout it is described as "śrita-jana-mandāra". This phrase occurs in many a devotional hymn. Santāna and Haricandana are the other two celestial trees.

Pañcaite devataravo mandāraḥ pārijātākaḥ[5]
Santānaḥ kalpavṛkṣaśca pumsi va haricandanam

"The five celestial trees like Kalpaka fulfil the wishes of only those who stand in their shade, and only during the time they stand under them. And they do so with their hands which are the tender leaves sprouting at the end of their branches. And only the denizens of the celestial world can stand under these trees. But what about Ambā's sacred feet? They fulfil the wishes of all people and at all times including the poor living in hovels in remote places," observes the Ācārya. Here he brings in the vegetable kingdom, reference to which is left out in the third stanza.

The dust on Ambā's feet (according to the third stanza) is the light of the rising sun that dispels nescience, the vital nectar that removes the inertness of objects and the Cintāmaṇi that banishes poverty.

What else does the dust do? For us what is important is becoming learned and prosperous. But for the Ācārya it is different: he wants all of us to be freed from nescience and from worldly existence. The Ācārya first mentions (Stanza 3) freedom from the darkness of nescience and concludes the stanza with the mention of freedom from the round of birth and death. In the middle two lines, though he brings in intelligence (or learning) and prosperity, he mentions in the first and last line, as guards so to speak, cessation of nescience. "Daridrāṇām Cintāmaṇi guṇanikā": after saying this he concludes the stanza, with, "janma-jaladhau nimagnānām daṁṣṭrā Muraripu-varāhasya bhavati". "Janma jaladhi" is the same as what Tiruvalluvar[g] calls *"piravi peruṅkaḍal"* (the great ocean of birth). It is also the same as what Apparsvāmigal[g] describes as *"poymāyāpperuṅkaḍal"* (the great ocean that is false and illusory), the ocean of birth and death. We are totally immersed in it. "Nimagnānām" means "for those who are immersed". What is the dust on the feet of Ambā for those who are immersed in the ocean of worldly existence? It is "Muraripu-varāhasya daṁṣṭrā bhavati".: It is the tusk of the Boar incarnation of Mahāviṣṇu. What does this mean, being the tusk of the Boar incarnation?

You will see among sculptures one showing Bhūvarāhasvāmī bearing the Goddess Earth on his tusk. Hiraṇyākṣa stole Goddess Earth and hid her in the ocean. Then the Lord took the incarnation of the Boar and penetrating deep into the ocean scooped up Goddess Earth with his beautiful tusk and brought her up carrying her on his tusk itself. Similarly, the dust on the feet of Ambā is the Boar's tusk that takes us up from the ocean of birth and death: "janma-jaladhau nimagnānām daṁstrā Muraripu varāhasya bhavati."

To denote Viṣṇu's Boar incarnation the Ācārya uses the term "Muraripu-varāham". Viṣṇu got the name of Muraripu (foe of Mura) from the fact that he slew the demon Mura. Murāri also means the same. [Both "ripu" and "ari" mean opponent, enemy.] Mura was a companion of Narakāsura. Kṛṣṇa killed them both, Narakāsura and also Mura who had come to his help. Instead of any of the names of Mahaviṣṇu proper, the Ācārya uses the names the god came to have during his incarnation as Kṛṣṇa — Śauri in the previous stanza and Muraripu in this. This lends strength to the belief that he has a special fondness for the Kṛṣṇa incarnation.

Notes & References

[1] *Saundaryalaharī*, 33

[2] Rudrākṣa : *Elaeocarpus ganitrus.*

[3] The term "caitanya stabakam" which occurs in the third stanza of the hymn the Great Guru is commenting upon is explained by Lakṣmīdhara as the cluster of flowers that is the caitanya of the Kalpakavṛkṣa.

[4] *Sundaryalaharī*, 89

[5] From the *Amarakośam.*

Chapter 40

Abhaya not Granted by the Hand

In the next stanza (4) also the Ācārya sings the praises of Ambā's sacred feet. But he does not reveal it all of a sudden at the beginning itself and keeps us in suspense.

Tvadanyaḥ pāṇibhyām abhayavarado daivatagaṇaḥ
Tvamekā naivāsi prakaṭita- varābhītyabhinayā
Bhayāt-trātum dātum phalamapi ca vañchāsamadhikam
Śaraṇye lokānām tava hi caraṇāveva nipuṇau.

"All deities other than you have the mudras[g] of abhaya and varada. That is, they are seen with hand gestures that signify the banishment of fear and the granting of boons. You alone do not enact through your hand gestures to suggest that you grant boons to your devotees or banish their fear." This is what the first half of the stanza means.

"What," one might exclaim, "why does the Ācārya speak like this? Does it mean that Ambā does not free us from fear? Is she not installed as Abhayāmbikā at Māyavaram?[1]" (The name "Avayam" by which girls are known here is derived from "Abhayam".) She is also called Varapradāyinī (one who grants boons).

It is not the Ācārya's view that Ambā does not grant boons or that she does not free us from fear. All he says is that, unlike other deities, she does not do so with her hand gestures.

"What does this mean?"

It means Ambā grants us boons and frees us from fear with her feet. This is what the Ācārya mentions in the second half of the stanza. "Tava hi caraṇau eva nipuṇau": "your feet themselves are capable of doing the same", granting us boons and freeing us from fear. They are "specialists" in the same.

What the celestial trees do with their branches (which are their hands) Ambā does with her feet. I have already spoken about this idea which occurs in a later stanza. Here the Ācārya says: "Your feet have the special ability to protect your devotees from fear ('bhayāt trātum') and to shower on them boons far more than what they ask for ('phalamapica vāñchāsamadhikam dātum')."

What one does with one's hand entails mental and physical effort. Work itself is called "kārya" and the word is derived from "kara" meaning "hand". Deities other than Ambā have to use their hands (make hand gestures) and strain themselves in granting boons to their devotees, in freeing them from fear. "But you are all-powerful. You accomplish everything with ease and all that is needed is your mental resolve." Ambā performs the five functions (pañcakṛtya) like creation, sustenance and so on by flickering her eyebrows for a moment. The Ācārya states this later (Stanza 24): "Kṣaṇacalitayoḥ bhrūlatikayoḥ", by knitting for a brief moment her eyebrows that are like creepers. A deity like her does not have to make any effort with her hands to give boons to her devotees or to free them from fear. Her very presence is enough. What is her form like?

"Lokānām śaraṇye," says the Ācārya. She is the refuge of all the worlds. So all people fall at her caraṇas (feet), chanting "śaraṇam" ("we come to you for refuge"). While she, as her natural self, is the refuge of all, her feet grant boons and ward off the fear of all those who go to her seeking her protection. She does not have to make any effort for this. She is like a flower spreading its fragrance.

When you pray to a deity for freedom from fear you will receive just that boon (freedom from fear) and nothing more. But if you ask for this or that you may receive more than what you ask for. If you ask for an LIG (low-income group) flat as a boon it is possible you will receive an HIG (high-income group) flat. The feet of Ambā are such—they give you more than what you ask the goddess for —"vāñchāsamadhikam."

One question may arise here. "Why cannot Ambā give her devotee abhaya (freedom from fear) as one among the many boons she grants? You ask for this and that and if you ask the Lord for abhaya he will grant that boon too. So why should abhaya be separated from other boons and why should you specially pray for it?

Abhaya is not a commodity belonging to the give-and-take business. It is indeed another name for Advaita. The Upaniṣads themselves say: "There is fear only when there are two (dvaitam)[2]." When there is only one what else is there of which you have to be afraid? Only when there is a second entity do you have reason of any fear being caused by it. "If a man thinks that there is even the slightest difference between him and the Brahman he will be afraid of it," so says the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*[3]. When we think of the Brahman as being separate from us, that is as the Saguṇa Brahman[g], ours is an attitude of devotion mixed with fear for it. Europeans speak of a man's "God-fearing" nature as among his high qualities. When does such a fear cease to exist? When we have the Advaitik realisation that we do not exist as a jīvātman (individual Self) separate from Īśvara. When there is One Object, without a second, there cannot be two separate entities, one who grants boons and the other who receives them. The hand gesture called abhaya just serves the purpose of a mark for a deity but in truth abhaya is an abstract concept. It is a mark of the state of the Supreme Truth, a state in which there cannot exist the business of giving boons and of receiving them. The Lord frees us from all fear, the fear of being born again, the fear of death, the fear of being dualistically separated; but abhaya is the realisation of Advaita. That is why it is not included among the boons and treated separately.

Why then should vara and abhaya (the granting of boons and of freedom from fear) be divided into two separate categories? In other systems (that are dualistic) the banishment of "bhavabhīti" or the fear of being born again and again is considered the highest of the Lord's blessings and in keeping with its importance abhaya is mentioned separately. These systems do not go beyond such an explanation.

In the abhaya gesture of a deity, the right hand will point upward. They (those belonging to dualistic systems) would say that it points to the upper realms of Vaikuṇṭha or Kailāsa. We (Advaitins) would say that it points to the state of Advaita which is absolute and undivided like space.

In the vara hasta (the hand gesture denoting the granting of boons) the hand will point downward. To say "I want this, I want that" bespeaks an attitude that betrays that the devotee belongs to a lower plane. That is why the vara mudra is like that. Giving anything with the left hand is usually regarded as not dignified. But it can also be taken in a good sense. After all, Ambā herself belongs to the left. The hand that signifies abhaya is quiescent or functionless and belongs to the side of Śiva who is all quietude. So the vara hasta that blesses belongs appropriately to the left where Śakti is. To what does this hand point? To Amba's lotus feet. "I give you my feet. Hold them. That is the great boon." We can thus interpret the vara mudra in this high sense also.

Notes & References

[1] "Māyavaram" is also known as "Māyūram" and "Mayilāḍuturai" and it is in Tañjāvūr district, Tamiḷ Nāḍu.

[2] "Dvitīyād vai bhayam bhavati."

— *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 2.7.1.*

[3] "Yadā hyevaiṣa etasminnadṛsye'na'tmye' nirukte'nilayane'bhayam pratiṣṭhām vindate. Atha so'bhayam gato bhavat: Yada hyevaiṣa etasminnudaramantaram kurute. Atha tasya bhayam bhavati. Tattveva bhayam viduśo' manvānasya. Tadapyeṣa śloko bhavati".

— *Taitirīya Upaniṣad, 2.7.1*

Chapter 41

Deity of the Hymn Hinted At

The Ācārya observes in this stanza (4) that hand gestures are associated with deities other than Ambā. He says: "You do not make the hand gestures denoting the grant of boons and of freedom from fear." "Tvamekā naivāsi prakaṭita varābhītyabhinayā." (You are the only one who does not grant boons and freedom from fear by making hand gestures.)

He says so having in mind Ambā in her form of Lalitā-Tripurasundarī who is, after all, the subject of this hymn.

Since it is said that if Śiva is activated it is because of her, it follows that she is the source of the power of all deities. That being the case, if they grant vara and abhaya their power for doing so is also derived from her. Would it not then mean that she is the highest of those granting vara and abhaya? What other deities do with their hands she does with ease with her feet, that is not by making hand gestures. But Ambā in her form of Bhuvaneśvarī does have the hand gestures of vara and abhaya. Even Tripurasundarī in her form of the Child Amba (she is Bālā, Ambā as daughter), has hands with the vara and abhaya mudras[g].

"Tvadanyaḥ pāṇibhyām abhayavarado daivatagaṇaḥ": "the groups of deities other than you have mudras of vara and abhaya." We should not take the Ācārya literally here, that all deities other than Ambā have hand gestures of vara and abhaya. In any direction we turn, in every nook and corner, we see Vighneśvara. Does he have these hand gestures? No. What about Naṭarāja? He has the abhaya hand but not the vara. We see in many temples that the icon of Viṣṇu-Durgā has only the abhaya hand. Mīnākṣī does not have either. As for Mahāviṣṇu he has hands holding the conchshell, the discus, the mace and the lotus, but he has no vara and abhaya hands.

Varadarāja in Kāñcīpuram has only the abhaya hand but no vara hand, even though he is Varadarāja. With the hand that is usually associated with the granting of boons he holds the mace. Everywhere, Mahālakṣmī is seen with both the vara and abhaya hand gestures. Sarasvatī has neither.

In the case of Durgā and some idols of Subrahmaṇya the abhaya hand is on the right side and the left hand directly opposite rests on the thigh — this is known as the "ūruhasta" (hand on the thigh). In the case of Venkaṭaramaṇa the right side has the vara hand and the left hand directly against it is placed on the thigh (ūruhasta).

Lalitā-Tripurasundarī has neither a hand with vara mudra nor an abhaya hand. Instead she has the bow of sugarcane and the arrows of flowers. In a later stanza, however, the Ācārya expresses the view that all the four hands of the goddess grant abhaya. In the beginning Brahmā, like Śiva, had five heads. But because of an offence committed by him Śiva plucked off one of them. The Ācārya says in the stanza referred to above that Brahmā adored the four hands of Ambā in the belief that the remaining four heads of his would not be endangered and that each of them would receive the abhaya of one of her hands. It seems that when Ambā, instead of her husband, grants abhaya she would be committing an improper act— an offence—if she did it with her feet. So it was that she granted freedom from fear to Brahmā with her hands.

So, but for her form of Tripurasundarī, Ambā has the vara and abhaya hands. Apart from her, a number of other deities also do not have these hand gestures. But because of poetic licence and in order to heighten the glory of the subject of the hymn, that is Ambā, the Ācārya states with a bit of exaggeration: "All deities other than you have the vara and abhaya hands. You alone do not show yourself to be possessing them."

He describes the mudras, the hand gestures, as "abhinaya", enactment: "varābhītyabhinayā". The mudras mentioned for enactment in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are the same as those mentioned in the mantra śāstra. "Abhinaya" is giving outward expression to one's inner feelings and emotions through movements of one's face, hands and legs. Of them, the feelings or ideas conveyed through the hands, particularly with the fingers, are called mudras.

Diety of the Hymn Hinted At

In the first three stanzas it is not clearly stated which of the many aspects of Ambā or forms is the subject of the hymn. From the title too we cannot make out what it is—or who it is — and we have two titles, "Ānandalaharī" for the first section and "Saundaryalaharī" for the second. It is only in the fourth stanza that the Ācārya gives a little clue by stating that she [Ambā or her form that is the theme of the hymn] has neither a vara nor an abhaya hand. He speaks about what she does not possess, but not what she does possess. He does not, for instance, mention the number of hands she has nor the objects held by them. So there is much room for conjecture about who she is. In .he next two stanzas also the Ācārya does not reveal the secret but he gives some more clues as to who she is. It is only in a subsequent stanza, in the seventh, that he describes the characteristics of the deity, the subject of his hymn, in the manner of a dhyāna-śloka[8], mentioning at the same time that she is the presiding deity of the Śrīvidyā tantra, that is Lalitāmbikā, or Tripurasundarī. But even here he does not mention the name. Throughout the hymn he does not mention it anywhere. The Ācārya has followed the poetic technique in this. He does not disclose the name of the deity (the subject of his hymn) at the very start and excites the reader's interest by revealing it little by little by offering clues, and finally loosening up and emptying it all, so to speak.

Chapter 42

Can Kāma Ever be a Blessing?

In the next stanza, that is the fifth, the Ācārya says that it was by performing pūjā to Ambā that Mahāviṣṇu was able to assume the divinely alluring form of Mohinī that stirred so firm a mind as that of Śiva and created in him love for that form. During the churning of the ocean for amṛta (ambrosia), Viṣṇu took the form of Mohinī and by enchanting the asuras by her beauty and by clever talk denied them their share of the ambrosia which he (she) then distributed among the celestials. You must be familiar with this story. Parameśvara was smitten with love for Mohinī and married her. The child born of their union is Ayyappa-Śāstā, also called Hariharaputra, after his parents. So goes the story. In his *Śiva-pādādi-keśānta-stotra,* the Ācārya extols Vighneśvara, Subrahmaṇya and Śāstā (Śāstā, Śiva's third son). It is in the land where Malayāḷaṁ is spoken and where the Ācārya was born that Ayyappa-Śāstā is more famous than anywhere else.

In the context of the arousal of the desire in the Brahman to conduct the affairs of the world, did I not say that the Brahman and the Brahma-Śakti were spoken of in erotic terms as the Kāmeśvara-Kāmeśvarī pair? It was by worshipping Ambā that Mahāviṣṇu, as Mohinī, was able to involve Parameśvara in love. This idea occurring here gives us a clue to the fact that Kāmeśvarī is the subject of the hymn. It is also supported by the statement in the previous stanza that the deity of the hymn does not have the hasta-mudras denoting the hands that grant boons and freedom from fear.

The second half of the stanza confirms our guess about the deity hymned. It says: "By prostrating himself before you and obtaining your grace did Manmatha acquire the form that Ratī 'lapped up' with her eyes, a form that was visible only to her. And then even those, including the sages, who had conquered their senses, were possessed by Manmatha and so were inspired by love."

Manmatha who had been reduced to ashes by Īśvara was restored to life and to his old position by Kāmeśvarī. This supports our conjecture that Kāmeśvarī is the subject of the hymn.

How can Ambā be extolled as the one who imparted the power to Manmatha to drag Īśvara into kāma, Īśvara who is the embodiment of jñāna and the object of our adoration? Again how can she be praised, she who gave strength to Manmatha to enchant even the sages and inspire their minds with desire? "It is a hymn of a high order and it is by the Ācārya. How can we find fault with it in this manner?" Such a question does arise even though we are reluctant to ask it. Jñāna arises when the illusory world ceases to exist for us. But here, in this hymn, the creation of the world is attributed to Ambā. There is jñāna only when there is no kāma. But here Ambā is adored as the one who strengthens kāma. Can it be so? If it is, we are gnawed by doubts as to whether kāma itself is a blessing.

There must be forces opposed to one another. They must clash with one another, break one another's heads. The good forces must fight with the bad ones and win and hoist the flag of victory. Only then can they take pride in themselves. That also creates an interest in life. If there is no opposition to the good forces and if things go smoothly for them they may not even become known to the world. Also it will all be a bore. You will know the goodness of shade (how comforting it is) only after you have been in the sun.

The tussle between opposing forces is to show that ultimately good will be victorious. It is to demonstrate this truth that the still and quiescent Parabrahman is said to have the urge of kāma and is associated with the cosmos. It is because the kāma of the Brahman that the universe came into being. Then the sentient cosmos grew with each sentient creature becoming subject to kāma.

A strange thing about the opposing forces of good and evil is that the good forces have evil elements in them and the evil forces have good elements in them. We must have an understanding of this subtle truth in our struggle so as to fully appreciate the cosmic drama and its various moods. That desire and anger are bad is a statement based on a generalisation. If you go deep into the subject you will recognise that they too have good aspects. You must have desire for the good, for good subjects. Bad objects must arouse anger in you. In such a sense desire and anger are not evils. They may even be necessary at times. Even in what appears to be good or virtuous bad elements may lie hidden.

There are two things to be considered above everything else: the Lord bestowing his compassion on us is one: the second is our going to him for refuge, our surrendering to him. These two are possible only when there is creation and when there are bad elements which it is necessary for us to combat. The highest as far as the Lord is concerned is bestowing his compassion on us; and the highest on our side is to surrender to him. The best we can do is not to do anything, realising that we are incapable of doing anything.

If there was no creation or if there was creation and yet people were not troubled by desire, anger and so on, where would be the opportunity for Ambā to show her compassion? If there was no trouble for anybody and everybody was satisfied with his or her lot, who would care for Ambā's compassion? When we fight the forces that oppose us as best we can and eventually realise that we are not strong enough to triumph over them, only then will we think of Ambā and go to her for refuge, crying, "You alone are our help." And only then will we experience the great joy of surrender—and only then will Ambā come rushing to protect us and only then will there be full scope for her to show her compassion and take delight in the same. When Ambā's protection becomes an accomplished fact, the compassion of "that side" [that is of Ambā] and the surrender of "this side" [that is our going to her for refuge] will be dissolved in the confluence of the flows of joy experienced by both sides. Any kind of inquiry now into whether it was the victory of Ambā or of us [the individual Self] has no meaning: the individual Self becomes she, that is becomes Ambā.

It would be all right even if a hundred thousand or ten million people were spoiled and their lives rendered futile. It would be enough if one in ten million became successful in the fight against evil forces and went beyond creation. Is it necessary for all the seeds borne by a tree to become trees? Do the millions of sperms produced by a man become fertilised and become his offspring? Similarly, it would be enough if one in ten million people attained fullness. In that, Ambā thinks, the purpose of creation will be fulfilled.

Even all those who have been spoiled and become futile will not remain so for all time. Our religion does not subscribe to the doctrine of eternal damnation. Madhvācārya gave expression to a view akin to it. Let us take it that he hoped that at least by instilling fear in the minds of people they would be turned to good. It is our general belief that there is liberation even for a great sinner. Even if it takes eons and eons, Ambā will correct her children who have been spoiled and hold them in her lap.

A rājā was away from his capital to wage a war. On the scene of battle he saw one of his ordinary subjects and asked him to see him in his camp. "I will be denied entry into your camp," the man said. "You must give me your signet ring or something similar." The rājā gave him a ring but on examination it was found to be the enemy king's signet ring.

The man was puzzled. The rājā laughed and explained to him why he had given him such a ring. "Many people have taken my signet ring for this and that purpose. Already there is a long queue of such men. If you join this queue it will take long before your turn comes and by then the purpose for which I want you will have lost its urgency. That is why I gave you the enemy king's signet ring. We have confiscated such rings from his spies and what I have given you is one of them. Keep it hidden and pretend to come stealthily to me, making sure that you will be seen by my bodyguard. They will take you captive, inspect your person and, seeing the enemy king's signet ring, bring you to me before it is the turn of all others."

What Ambā does is similar. Desire and anger are like the enemy king's signet ring that takes us to her. Kṛṣṇa Paramātman asked Kuntī her wish. "I want suffering. Grant me that. Then alone will I think of you," she said. How is suffering caused? By desire, anger and so on. Only when we are tormented by them, when we suffer their consequences do we think of the Lord and pray to him. We will then realise how the creation of this world, kāma and krodha (anger) are all blessings.

If Ambā bestows kāma on an individual it is because she will have an opportunity to show her compassion. But this does not stop with that individual. It is an "arrangement" by which the children born of his kāma will also receive her compassion. It is because of her compassion that they (the children) are born [they get their janma]. One more point to be added to what has been said here and which is contrary to our beliefs concerning desire and anger: Great men have sung, they have indeed cried loudly as if in despair, "No more birth." But here it is stated that the fact that many are born because of the kāma of one entity is a blessing. How can that be?

It is all right to cry, "No more birth." But can people who have bundles and bundles of karma still to be exhausted escape by crying like that? To work out their remaining karma they have to be born again and again and live virtuously. If there is no kāma how can people be born again so as to unload their burden of karma? During the time an opportunity is given them by rebirth and if they do not wash away their past karma and add further to the impurity of their karma, it will be their own fault. Birth is an opportunity given us to bring an end to further birth. We must understand this truth and act accordingly.

It is out of her compassion that Ambā created kāma and "appointed" Manmatha as its authority: she did so because people should have an opportunity to exert themselves so as to be freed from birth. She established a system in which kāma is one of the aims of a man's life along with dharma, artha and mokṣa[1]. Kāma is to be experienced in the householder's stage of life and in a disciplined and restrained manner, according to the tenets of the śāstras. If life is lived in this manner, in due time you will be freed from kāma, become purified, and taken to the higher stage of sannyāsa.

There are exceptions to all rules governing matters in creation. In keeping with this Ambā has created a few individuals—a very few individuals—who observe strict brahmacarya from childhood and remain sannyāsins till the very end of their lives.

"These explanations are all right. But why should Īśvara who is the personification of jñāna have been disturbed by kāma? Why should the minds of seers—seers who have conquered their senses—be similarly disturbed? And why should Ambā be adored for doing the same?

That they were agitated by kāma is not the end of the story. The fact is they became pure again. If they were at one time subject to kāma it was for the well-being of the world. Thus Hariharaputra was born to slay a demon who had received a boon according to which only such a son (of Śiva and Viṣṇu) could slay him. If Viśvāmitra had not been enchanted by Menakā there would have been no Śakuntalā and the play Śā*kuntalam*. If Vyāsa had not been attracted by Kṛtāśi there would have been no Śukācārya who was unmatched for his observance of brahmacarya.

These accounts remind us that without the help, without the grace, of Parāśakti, anyone, whoever he be, will stumble and fall. We should not think that we can achieve things on our own and we must remain humble always, seeking her grace.

We must also consider this : whoever has the power and authority to create something, he alone has the power and authority to destroy it. If the government alone has the power to make laws it means it alone has the authority to rescind them. Can we, on our own, change the laws of the government? If Ambā has the authority to create this world as well as kāma, she alone can free us from this world—and she alone can give us a helping hand to become freed from kāma. There is another side to the fact that she appointed Kāma (Manmatha) an authority and brought even seers under his spell. A coin has an obverse side and a reverse side. That Ambā brought seers under the spell of Manmatha may be taken as the obverse side of the coin. The reverse side of it is that of her bidding Manmatha to keep away from certain individuals and keeping them untainted. Manmatha is an authority so far as we are concerned; he is a servant of hers. We cannot triumph over kāma on our own. It has to happen by her "issuing orders" to that effect. She who sets Manmatha on us, she alone has the authority to keep him away from us. The present stanza speaks only of Ambā urging Manmatha to bring us under his spell. We must understand that there is a reverse side to this, that she will grant us the grace of destroying Kāma.

Reference

[1] The four "puruṣārthas" or aims of a man's life. See Chapter 3, "The Purpose of Religion", Part One, *Hindu Dharma*.

Chapter 43

The Power of Ambā's Sidelong Glance

It Made Kāma a Triumphant Hero

The next stanza (6) is entirely devoted to Manmatha. The dualistic world emerging from non-dualism as a result of kāma or desire and then the same dualistic world being made non-dualistic through the compassion of Ambā has a central place in her sport. Kāma (Manmatha), who is the personification of desire, has great importance here. Ambā herself has divine names like Kāmeśvarī and Kāmākṣī.

Dhanuḥ pauṣpam maurvī madhukaramayī pañcaviśikhāḥ
Vasantaḥ sāmanto malayamarudāyodhana-rathaḥ
Tathāpyekaḥ sarvam himagirisute kāmapi-kṛpām
Apāṅgātte labdhvā jagadidamanaṅgo vijayate

"With weapons by no means strong Manmatha triumphs over all the world. What is it that gives him such power? It is Ambā's sidelong glance," this is the import of the stanza.

What are Manmatha's weapons or tools? The first is "dhanuḥ pauṣpam", a bow made of flowers.

Why does Manmatha go to war? He wants to conquer all creatures of the world, that is he wants to subject them to kāma or desire. He sets out on his chariot, bearing in his hands his bow and arrows and taking with him his companions and assistants. We are amused to note what his bow and chariot are like.

The first, the bow [as we have already noted], is made of flowers; "dhanuḥ pauṣpam".

That Manmatha's bow is the sugarcane is common knowledge. If all [warriors] have iron bows, he has a sugarcane bow. If it is bent it will break. But, according to the Ācarya, Manmatha has even a less fragile bow, one made of flowers. Though not as strong as one made of iron, a sugarcane bow has some weight. If you hit a man on his head with it it will hurt.

"Was it right on the part of the Ācārya to have changed Manmatha's bow, make it one of flowers instead of sugarcane? For any deity his weapons are like his eyes, nose and so on, part and parcel of his make-up. When we perform pūjā or homa to a deity it is on the basis of his/her physical parts and the weapons possessed by him/her, "sāṅgāyai sāyudhāyai" (here the reference is to a female deity). Then why has the Ācārya changed the weapon of Manmatha? Could it be that the true form of "pauṣpam" is "pauṇḍram"? The bow of Kāma and Kāmākṣī is the sugarcane called "puṇḍra ikṣu". In the *Śyāmalādaṇḍakaṁ* Ambā is addressed as "Puṇḍreksu-pāśāṅkuśa-puṣpabāṇahaste". I was wondering whether "pundrekṣu" was taken to be "pauṇḍraṁ" and whether "pauṣpaṁ" was wrongly derived from it. Then I reminded myself how it was in the *Amarakośam.* I discovered that "pauṣpaṁ" was right, that the Ācārya had not changed the bow of Manmatha: to think so would be sacrilegious. I had also thought of the possibility of the Ācārya having correctly used the word "pauṇḍram" and of someone else wrongly inscribing it on the palm-leaf. I was wrong in thinking thus. Among the many names of Manmatha mentioned in the *Amarakośam* we have the following: "Puṣpadhanva Ratipatir Makaradhvaja Ātmabhūḥ." "Puṣpadhanva" is the same as the word used by the Ācārya, "dhanuḥ pauṣpam." There is no mention of sugarcane (of Manmatha having a bow of sugarcane) at all.

Subrahmaṇya, it is said, has two peacocks (as his vehicles). He had a peacock as his mount from his childhood itself. Later he slew the demon Śūrapadma and made him a peacock which became another vehicle of his. Thus he has two peacocks. In some temples to him, the head of the peacock is to his left and the plumage is to his right. It is the peacock that was originally Śūrapadma. But in most temples of Subrahmaṇya the head of the peacock is to his right and the plumage to his left. And that is the divine peacock he has had from the very beginning. Similarly, it occurs to me that Manmatha has two bows, one of flowers and another of sugarcane.

Manmatha's arrows are also flowers. In the *Amarakośam* we find that one of his names is "Kusumeṣu". "Kusumam" = flower; "iṣu" =

arrow; so "Kusumeṣu" means one who has arrow(s) of flowers. In the present stanza we have the term "pañcaviśikhāḥ", meaning five arrows. The number of arrows is mentioned but not what they are. Usually warriors keep a large number of arrows in their quiver. But Manmatha has just five, and they are delicate flowers. The five flowers: aravinda, aśoka, cūta, navamallikā and nīlotpala, according to the *Amarakośam*. "Pañcaśara", one with five arrows, is one of the names of Manmatha mentioned in that lexicon[1].

The bow of flowers is not hard and there are just five arrows. We usually speak of certain objects piercing us like an arrow. But these arrows of Manmatha are the opposite in nature. Instead of piercing us, any one of these arrows is such that the moment you see it you would like to rub the most delicate part of your body, your eye, with it. The string of the bow is made of honey-bees. These may seem to cause some fear. The pain will be unbearable if they happen to sting us. But, then, they are not meant to sting the "target" of Manmatha. If they go seeking the target how will Manmatha be able to discharge his arrows? How do you then account for their presence? The answer is they enjoy the fragrance of the bow of flowers and the flower arrows and keep humming in joy.

Now the sugarcane bow. Sugarcane is the source of sugar or jaggery, the source of the sweetness of everything. In the present stanza what is mentioned is the flower-bow. But the sugarcane-bow comes naturally to mind. And does not Ambā bear in her hand the sugarcane-bow? Since Kāma and Kāmeśvarī have the same, to speak of Kāma having the sugarcane bow may not be wrong. Like sweetness among tastes so is love among feelings. We liken hatred, the opposite of love, to sharpness of taste. When we say that so-and-so speaks sharply or pungently, don't we mean he speaks with hate? So if we wish to battle with someone and vanquish him the right thing to carry would be a weapon of chillies. As for Manmatha, he carries the opposite, the weapon of sugarcane.

Sugarcane is the sweetest thing in the world, and the softest are flowers. The bark of a tree is rough. If we happen to rub ourselves against it we will bleed. Some trees have thorns sticking out of their bark or stems. The leaves may be tender and soft but they are often uncomfortably sticky and as the days pass they lose their smoothness and become harsh to the touch. Take any fruit. When it is tender it will be rough; both the unripe [the stage after it is tender] and ripe fruit will be smooth to the touch, but the sap oozing from the stalk will be sticky. Flowers are the purest of things, the lightest, the softest and the most beautiful. However wild or brutish a man may be, his eyes are delicate and even a speck of dust can make them red. Similarly, a tree like the banyan may be gnarled and knotty and adamantine but how delicate are its flowers, how soft. Is it not remarkable that Manmatha has five such flowers for his arrows? Aravinda, aśoka, cūta, navamallikā and nīlotpala — each of these stands for a particular sense organ. In the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam* the five arrows borne by Ambā are also associated with the five senses. They are called the "Pañcatanmātra-sāyakā": the five tanmātras are the five subtle bhūtas perceived by the five senses, the five bhūtas being śabda (sound), sparśa (touch), rūpa (form), taste (rasa) and gandha (smell).

If the five arrows are to be aimed at the five senses, what is the bow from which they are to be discharged? It is the mind which is the support of the five senses. The *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam* has this name for Ambā, "Manorupekṣu-kodaṇḍa" (the one with the bow of sugarcane symbolising the mind). The name "Pañca-tanmātra-sāyakā" comes later.

Each flower as we have already noted symbolises a sense. Not only that, each is associated with one of the five tanmatras. Where there is a flower there is a bee also. I think that the bee provides one of the tanmātras that the flower does not have. The flower is soft to the touch, is beautiful to behold (has a beautiful form), has the taste or rasa of nectar and has a pleasant smell. But it does not have the beauty of sound. And this lack is filled by the humming of the bee that comes in search of its nectar. Manmatha does not go to battle with the cry of "Kill" but with the music of the bees humming, the bees that make up the string of his bow.

"Dhanuḥ pauṣpam maurvī madhukaramayī pañcaviśikhāḥ." Thus the bow, its string and arrows are not what ought to be, that is there is nothing warlike about them in strength or harshness. There are weak rājās who have strong vassals paying them tribute and on the strength of the latter they keep winning laurels of victory. What about the rājā that is Kāma? Has he any strong and tough assistants to help him? No, there is none.

"Vasantaḥ sāmantaḥ."

The vassal of Manmatha, his assistant and companion, is Vasanta or Spring. It is said that the season of spring personified, Vasanta, comes as the companion of Manmatha to serve him by inflaming the passion of people. He is the embodiment of the time when it is extremely pleasant, when the sun is gentle and it is neither hot nor cold. On his advent the trees, shorn of their leaves, will acquire a raiment of green and give shade to people. And there will be a riot of flowers. The season of spring is also called "puṣpa-samayaṁ" (the time of flowers). The sun is not harsh now and the cold is not biting, and it is a feast for the eyes and the nose. Is it not amusing that the one who personifies such a season should be a companion to the belligerent Kāma? It is customary for a combatant in a war to discharge the āgneyāstra or the stambhanāstra. Here, however, the companion of our warrior is one who creates salubrious weather.

When we come to consider the chariot on which Manmatha rides we will have more reason to be amused.

"Malayamarudāyodhana-rathaḥ"

"Āyodhana" = for the purpose of war; "rathaḥ" = chariot; "malayamarut" = the wind blowing from the mountain called Malaya: it means the cool wind redolent of the scent of sandalwood. Instead of spreading poison gas this enemy spreads the extremely pleasant and cool wind by making it his chariot. Since it is described as "mandam" it means it is not a strong wind[2].

Manmatha's weapons, his bow and arrows, are at least seen by the eyes. But his companion Vasanta and his chariot of wind are not visible. We know that spring is here when the trees that are bare burgeon and the mango blossoms and jasmines spread their fragrance. It is only by feeling the pleasant wind blowing on us that we recognise the arrival of the Marut chariot. Here we have an enemy vehicle like this, not the usual tank that comes rumbling along and crushes us under. Strangest of all is the warrior himself, Manmatha. What is he like? "Anaṅgaḥ."

He is Anaṅga. He has many names like Madana, Manmatha, Māra, Kandarpa and Kāma. But it is very meaningfully that the Ācārya has chosen the name of Anaṅga here.

What does the name mean? Anaṅga = An + aṅga, one without any limbs, incorporeal. It means Manmatha has no body or form. After he had been reduced to ashes by Parameśvara, Ambā restored him to life but without his body. She did not want to undo totally what her husband had done. It is for this reason that, though she restored him to life, she did not restore him to his body or form. But, out of compassion for his wife Ratī, Ambā blessed her that she would be able to see his physical form — that is she alone. For all the rest she made him a force like light, sound and wind.

A warrior would be well-nourished, big-built, with sinewy arms and legs. He would be fearful to look at as he twirls his moustaches. In our story the warrior is different. Leave alone his being not strong like one whose hands reaches down to the knees; Manmatha cannot be shown even as a gaunt and thin figure: he is formless.

Though Vasanta (Spring) has no visible form, you can know him from nature, from its luxuriance and guess what he is like. Even the chariot of Malayamāruta you may know from the wind blowing on you. But the one who has all these aṅgas, the "angī" who is the root of it all, you cannot guess what he is like in any way. He cannot be known and yet he remains a very subtle force penetrating each and all and holding sway over them.

How strange! One who has no body triumphs over all the world with instruments ridiculously weak.

During the slaying of Tripura, Parameśvara had a tremendously strong bow in the Meru mountain and its string was the serpent Vāsuki and the arrow was Mahāviṣṇu himself. The sun and the moon were the wheels of his chariot, the earth was its floor and the charioteer was Brahmā. But he did not use any of them to destroy the Tripura demons. He just laughed. That was all. There was no flailing of hands or legs by Śiva, no wrestling with his foes, no flexing of muscles. Parameśvara just laughed. He laughed thinking to himself: "I have Parāśakti in me, but they have come [that is Mahāviṣṇu, Brahmā and the rest] thinking I would need their help." The moment he laughed the Tripura demons were reduced to ashes.

Although Parameśvara had powerful instruments or weapons, he won without using any of them. Manmatha wins his war, with weapons that are not strong in the least. The reason is the same for both. It is Ambā [who is behind their victory]. She brought the Lord success by residing in him as Parāśakti. And here she has made Manmatha victorious all over the world by casting on him her sidelong glance for a fleeting moment, and thus blessing him.

The weapons at the disposal of Manmatha are utterly weak and he himself has no body. Even so—"tathāpi" —he triumphs over all the world all by himself. He has neither an army nor any cavalry or elephants and Vasanta is his companion only for name's sake. His success is due to "a little bit of your compassion which we cannot describe (kāmapi kṛpām)," so the Ācārya says addressing Ambā. He calls her "Himagirisute". How does Manmatha receive her compassion? The Ācārya says, addressing Ambā again, "Te apaṅgāt labdhva" ("apāṅgātte" in the śloka). That is "with your sidelong glance". With a little bit of Ambā's compassion, though with weak weapons, Manmatha triumphs over the world all by himself, "jagadidam sarvam vijayate".

To bestow blessings in this manner on everything in creation is the function of Māyā belonging to saprapañca[g]. For this the sidelong glance of Ambā for a fleeting moment is enough. The destruction of Tripura means the rejection of the subtle, gross and kāraṇa bodies and remaining the mahā-kāraṇa of the Brahman. This is what unites one with the niṣprapañca[g].

And it is possible only when Ambā inheres in one fully. If the one who burned Tripura also burned Kāma it was because the little grace the latter had obtained from Ambā could not stand against the power of the full grace Śiva had obtained from her.

To speak of the victory of Kāma, of Ambā making him victorious, should not be the end of the story for us. It is necessary that we triumph over Kāma overselves. We must remind ourselves that when Īśvara triumphed over Kāma (*i.e.* when he destroyed him), Ambā was present in him to lend him the necessary strength. Now we need her blessings. The power that creates: it alone can destroy. Here the Ācārya speaks of the power that creates.

It is with a high purpose that Ambā has given Manmatha weapons that have no strength. When he obtains victory with them it is that he will be humble enough to realise that he owes his success to her charity, to her kindness. It is for the reason that he should not become vain that, out of her compassion, she gave him such objects of little strength as were his weapons.

Anaṅga, one without limbs, one without a body, once possessed a body that was beautiful in all respects. It is as a reference to the fact that he once possessed a body of unsurpassed beauty that we still liken good-looking people to Manmatha. He was then vain about his looks and it was a time when the celestials were going through much suffering at the hands of Śūrapạdma. The demon could be killed only by a son born to Īśvara, but the god, in his form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, was then engaged in austerities. Manmatha was sent by the celestials to him so as to inspire love in him for Ambā who had descended to earth as the daughter of the king of mountains (Himavān or Himālaya). Among the various incarnations of Ambā, it was now that she appeared as Pārvatī, daughter of Himavān, and it was now that Īśvara burnt Manmatha. But later, having a change of mind, he was moved by love for Pārvatī and married her. So there is aptness in the use of the word "Himagirisutā". That story comes later.

To start with the celestials sent Manmatha so as to inspire feelings of love spring in the Lord's heart for Pārvatī. Then Manmatha became vain about the fact that he could churn the mind of Parameśvara himself and thus achieve a great victory. "Manmatha" means one who churns the mind, "Mathanam" means churning. Don't we speak of "kṣīrābdhi mathanam" (the churning of the ocean of milk)? Manmatha set out on his errand—the task entrusted to him by the celestials—and in his arrogance he thought that he could churn the mind of the Lord who was like a mountain of dispassion. But what happened to him? He was burnt beyond recognition. Later Ambā gave him new life and he was now no longer boastful that he could do anything. Then he triumphed over the Lord also but this is part of the "Kāmākṣī Purāṇa", not of "Manmatha Purāṇa". From this you must realise that Manmatha's success was entirely due to the strength given him by Kāmākṣī, that is Ambā. According to the purāṇa, Manmatha recognised the truth of this in all his humility. He approached the Lord now, not with the feeling, "I am going to win on my own strength", but with the thought that "the power of my Mother's blessings will bring me success". In this spirit did he approach the Lord and achieve victory. When he had been reduced to ashes by the fire of Śiva's eye, his pride in his own power had also been destroyed at the same time. It is because Ambā thought he should no longer nurse any pride in the beauty of his body that she restored him to life but did not restore him to his body.

"For the powerful even a blade of grass can be a weapon," so goes a proverb. Darbha is a kind of grass. Since it is sacred it is called *tūppul* in Taṃiḷ. A place in Kāñcīpuram where darbha grew in abundance is called Tūppul. Vedāntadeśika[8] was born there. To kill Kākāsura, Rāma used a blade of darbha for arrow. And the demon, unable to face it, fell at his feet. And Rāma forgave him. Here Rāma demonstrated the truth of the statement, "For the powerful even a blade of grass is a weapon." Rāma was powerful in many ways including in the use of mantras. It was with the potency of mantras that he made a weapon out of a blade of darbha grass. With the power imparted by the sidelong glance of Parāśakti even a flower becomes a weapon in the hands of Manmatha.

It was with such a sidelong glance of hers that Ambā restored Manmatha to life after he had been reduced to ashes. Her husband Śiva had destroyed him with his eye of fire and to restore him to life she glanced at these ashes with her ambrosial eye. And at once Manmatha got his life back. One meaning of "Kāmākṣī" is "she who created Kāma with her sidelong glance".

Notes

[1] Strictly speaking it is a book of synonyms.

[2] In the stanza that is being explained the word "mandam" does not occur. But it is customary to describe malayamarut as being "mandam".

Chapter 44

Kāma's Conquest of Śiva not Mentioned

That it was Lalitāmbā in her form of Kāmeśvarī who gave power and "status" to Kāma is indicated to some extent clearly in this stanza (that is the sixth). But it is not altogether openly stated. That Kāma triumphs over the world is mentioned—"jagadidam Anaṅgo vijayate"—but that he triumphed over Īśvara is not revealed. The chief sport of Kāmeśvarī in this story had the purpose of enabling him to accomplish that great victory. But this is not mentioned. The use of the term "Himagirisute" shows that the avatara of Ambā as Pārvatī happened during the time of the burning of Kāma, that is when Kāma met with failure at the hands of Īśvara and was indeed reduced to ashes. That the Lord later fell in love with Pārvatī and married her is not attributed to the work of Kāma nor described as his victory. It was Ambā's unalloyed love for the Lord and the amazingly intense austerities practised by her that moved Dakṣiṇāmūrti (Śiva in his quiescent form) and made him Kalyāṇasundara.

The story told in the *Skānda Purāṇa* and adapted by Kālidāsa (in his *Kumārasaṁbhavam*) is the same. In the previous stanza it is stated that Kāma created passion in the seers but there is no mention of his having triumphed over Īśvara, though it refers to the story of Mahāviṣṇu assuming the form of Mohinī. Viṣṇu is the father of Kāma, born of his mind, and hence called "Manasija". During his avatara as Kṛṣṇa, Manmatha was born as his son Pradyumna. The father himself, that is Viṣṇu, cast his spell (as Mohinī) on Paramaśiva and his (Viṣṇu's) son Manmatha enchants all the rest including great seers. The latter part of the hymn, the "Saundaryalaharī" section, mentions that Manmatha triumphed over the Lord. The two ear-ornaments of Ambā are reflected in her mirror-like face, which is like a chariot with these rings as its wheels (the two actual ear-rings and their reflected images). It is stated (Stanza 59) that Manmatha goes to battle with Īśvara riding this chariot. Ambā's loving glance is Manmatha's discharge of his arrow at Īśvara, so says one of the stanzas... [The Great Preceptor pauses....] No, it is in two stanzas (52 and 58). Another stanza (86) mentions Manmatha approaching Śiva riding his chariot, discharging his arrow, his conquest of the Lord and his cries of victory. But in the first section of the hymn this (Manmatha's victory) is not mentioned. It has been reserved for the second part in which there is more poetic beauty and aesthetic appeal.

What I wished to say is this. That the deity of the hymn is Kāmeśvarī is not completely disclosed yet. But in the stanzas so far the Ācārya has given us plenty of hints to help us guess as to who it is. But since he does not want to keep us guessing, in the next stanza, which is like a dhyāna-śloka[g], the form of Kāmeśvarī is fully described.

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Chapter 45

Not Śiva and Śakti — but Śivaśakti

The description of Kāmeśvarī will not be right or complete without her being shown as seated on the left side of the lap of Kāmeśvara. However, in sculptures and paintings it is rarely that she is seen in this manner. The reason may be that if Ambā were shown in a "gross" form like this, her importance would not be fully revealed and half of it might seem to be shared by her husband. In Kāñcīpuram itself is not Ambā seen unaccompanied by Kāmeśvara? Although there is another reason for it, she will lose her importance if Īśvara is the central figure and she occupies his left side, That is why all representations generally of Ambā, including Ravi Varmā's Rājarājeśvarī, are without her consort. One feels that at least for a change Kāmeśvarī must be shown with Kāmeśvara by some artist. When two deities, bearing four similar weapons, are seated close together it is very difficult to sculpt their figures or paint them in a way that people who see them do not get confused about the two bows, the two arrows and so on. The skill of an artist lies in surmounting such a difficulty and sculpt or paint the figures beautifully.

Mention of the name of Kāmeśvari at once brings to mind the name of Kāmeśvara. It may be because it is not proper to mention a female deity in her plain single form that we have names like Rājarājeśvarī, Lalitāmbā, Tripurasundarī, Vaḍivuḍaiyāmbāl. If we examine the mantra śāstra carefully we will note that, apart from bearing in her hands the bow, the arrow, the noose and the goad, Rājarājeśvarī must bear in two of the four additional hands books and the rosary (akṣamālā) and the other two hands must be her abhaya-hasta and vara-hasta. Besides, she must have the vīṇā leaning over her bosom. Lalitā-Tripurasundarī is in the squatting position, while Rājarājesvarī has her right leg bent in and her left leg hanging down from her seat: it is thus that she is customarily visualised. As Kāmeśvarī we must picture her to ourselves thus: she is seated on the left side of Kāmeśvara, bearing in her hands the bow, the arrows, the noose and the goad; she has only four hands and her right leg is bent in and her left leg hangs down from her seat. The Lord, her husband, has his right leg hanging down from his seat and his left leg is folded in. Ambā is seated on the folded part of his lap.

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In the dhyāna-śloka[g], Lalitā-[Mahā]-Tripurasundarī and Rājarājeśvarī are not mentioned as seated on Īśvara's left lap but as independent deities without the consort. When we have to keep our minds one-pointed and meditate on the presiding deity of a mantra, and mutter her names, we cannot do so visualising a figure with two faces.

In one stanza (23) of the *Saundaryalaharī* the Ācārya indicates the reason for regarding Ambā as a deity not accompanied by her consort. Ambā is not satisfied with stealing half of her husband's body in the Ardhanārīśvara form. So she takes over his right side also: she remains a lone deity with her complexion of red but with her husband's characteristics of the eye on the forehead and the crescent moon in her hair.

One of the ways of Ambā worship[1] is based on the belief that Īśvara has no form of his own nor any function. Even if he has them he owes them to her. Where is his power to accept our worship and bestow his grace? So he is not included in the worship. Pūjā is performed to Ambā alone who has a form and a function.

It is in keeping with such beliefs that the Ācārya has composed what may be regarded as a dhyāna-śloka[g] in which Ambā is described as being unaccompanied by Kāmeśvara.

The Ācārya commences his hymn mentioning two deities, Śiva and Śakti. But his goal is adoring a deity who is the Śakti of Śiva. He has composed the very first stanza with the thought that he must begin his hymn by mentioning first the father-mother pair (Śiva and Ambā or Śakti), that the first to be mentioned must be the husband of Ambā to proclaim her saumāṅgalyam[g], that he must be mentioned first and then she to make known her pātivratya[g]. But, in the later stanzas, he thought Śiva must not be made to share the importance of Ambā. He has composed his verses describing Ambā alone, that is instead of the two, Śiva and Śakti, a single entity that is Śivaśakti. (The stanza containing this description comes next.)

Note

[1] This is known as "Uttara Kaula".

Chapter 46

Portrait of Ambā

Kvaṇatkāñcī-dāmā kari-kalabha-kumbha-stana-natā
Parikṣīṇā madhye pariṇata-śaraccandra-vadanā
Dhanur-bāṇān pāśam sṛṇimapi dadhānā karatalaiḥ
Purastādāstām naḥ puramathiturāhopuruṣikā

"Kvaṇat kāñcīdāmā". "Kvaṇat" means the tinkling of the tiny bells fitted in ornaments. It is an onomatopoeic word. A girdle fitted with bells is "kāñcī". One without bells is "mekhalā". "Raṇatkiṇkiṇi-mekhalā" which occurs in the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam* denotes the same as "kvaṇat-kāñcīdāma". "Kāñcī" is called "maṇimekhalā". One of the Tamiḷ pañcakāvyas (five poems) is *Maṇimekhalai.* It is said that the heroine of the poem who bears the same name as its title came to Kāñcīpuram during the last days of her life and there, when there was a famine, fed the hungry and suffering people from her akṣayapātra[1]. *Maṇimekhalai* is a Buddhist work. Maṇimekhalai (the heroine of the poem) had her initiation from a Buddhist guru in Kāñcī and found fulfilment of her life, it is said. But the story of her feeding the starving people from her akṣayapātra seems to have been copied from the account of the sport of Kāmākṣī. *"Arai nāzhi nel koṇḍe eṇ nānku aram iyar̲r̲ināl*[2]," so goes a Purāṇik saying (in Tamiḷ) about Kāmākṣī. *Nāzhi* means *āzhākku*[3]. *"Unpadu nāzhi, uḍuppadu nālu muzham*[4]*"*: these words occur in a song by Auvvai[g]. With *azhākku* rice, which increased in quantity and was never exhausted, Ambā gave food to all. Not only that, she practised the 32 dharmas. According to tradition there are in all 64 dharmas. These are "condensed" into half, that is 32 dharmas. That is what is called "*en nānku aram* (8 x 4 dharmas). Some people may believe that the *Kāmākṣī Purāṇa* is based on the story of *Maṇimekhalai.* But the fact is the name of Kāmākṣī goes back to a time much earlier than that of Maṇimekhalai and existed during the Sangam[g] period. There was a woman scholar called "Kāmakaṇṇiyār Nappaśalaiyār" during the Sangam age. "Kāmakaṇṇi" means nothing but "Kāmākṣī". If the worship of Kāmākṣī was prevalent then her story must have also existed then—-including in it the account of her distributing food to the poor. If there was a time when the name of Rāma was known, the story of Rāma (the Rāmāyaṇa) must have also existed then. I say this to underline the appropriateness of Maṇimekhalai (which name means the same as Kāñcī) coming to Kāñcī during the last years of her life.

"Kvaṇat kāñcīdāmā". There is a hint here that the subject of the hymn is Lalitāmbā because of the word "kāñcī" used in it. In this land Ambā is worshipped in many forms from Kanyākumārī in the south to Kṣīrabhavānī in Kāśmīr in the north[5]: Bhagavatī, Cāmuṇḍeśvarī, Śāradāmbā, Mīnāksī, Akhilāṇḍeśvarī, Dharmasaṁvardhinī, Kamalāmbā, Bālāmbā, Śivakāmasundarī, Jñānāmbā, Bhramarāmbā, Kanakadurgā, Tulajā Bhavānī, Ambājī, Vindhyāvāsinī, Annapūrṇeśvarī, Kālī, Kāmākhyā, Vaiṣṇavī, etc. But the deity mentioned in the Śrīvidyā tantra, the deity with all the attributes and weapons of Lalitā-Tripurasundarī, can only be the Kāmākṣī of Kāñcīpuram. That is why the saying: even if you mention the name of the place you must not mention the name of the person. In this hymn, though Ambā's name is not mentioned, it seems the Ācārya has perhaps suggested the name by mentioning, or hinting at, her place through the term "Kāñcīdāmā".

When the earth itself is regarded as a female deity — don't we say Bhūmādevī? —- the place where her navel, the navel of the earth goddess, is situated is Kāñcīpuram. Since the girdle's front part is above the navel the place is called Kāñcī.

"Kāñcīdāmā": "dāmā" means a rope made of a number of strands tightened together. Kṛṣṇa came to be called Dāmodara from the fact that Yaśodā bound him with a rope passing round his abdomen. Since the girdle with bells is made of strands of gold that the Ācārya calls it "Kāñcī dāmā".

When Ambā comes walking it is not only her anklets that jingle but also the bells of her girdle.

A girdle that starts with the centre of the earth and, going round, returns to the centre must be immensely big. Since it entwines Ambā's waist we are likely to think that her waist is very huge. But, as a matter of fact, how is it?

"Parikṣīṇā madhye"

Ambā's waist is very thin. "Kṣīṇā" means "thin". With the prefix "pari" it means "very thin". This is a characteristic of women belonging to the highest category. They say *"tuḍiyiḍai koḍiyiḍai".*[6] Ambā is the confluence of all wonderful things. Like "mahat" in an "anu"—like the infinite in an atom — all the worlds are in *tuḍiyiḍai.*

Leave alone the beauty of Ambā's waist. What about her face? Is not the face the most important part of the body, "mukhya"? Now the word "mukhya" itself is derived from "mukha", face. We say that "of the body measuring eight spans the head is the most important". Now to come back to the question: What is Ambā's face like?

"Pariṇata-śaraccandra-vadanā."

The "pari" in "parikṣīṇā" with which the first half of the line begins is used again at the start of the second half of the line in "pariṇata". Such usage adds beauty to a poem and is a help in remembering it. In the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam* there are many examples of such usage. It is called *"moṇai"* in Tamiḷ (meaning alliteration in English).

When describing the face of Ambā, the Ācārya says it is "śaraccandra-vadanā", a face like the autumnal moon. Its whiteness has a special quality. In autumn the weather is pleasantly cool. "Pariṇata" means fully grown and refers to the full moon, the autumnal full moon. Ambā's face being radiant like the autumn full moon is hinted at, a face that showers the moonlight of grace. In a later stanza (63) the Ācārya describes this idea with poetic elegance, "Smita jyotsnā jālam tava vadanacandrasya pibatām."

Mention has been made of the girdle, of the waist round which it is worn and above all of the face. Should not the hands too be described now? A deity is identified by the number of hands he or she possesses and the weapons borne by him or by her.

"Dhanur-bāṇān pāśam sṛnimapi dadhānā karatalaiḥ"

Ambā carries in her hands the bow, the arrows, the noose and the goad (sṛni). These are the most important distinguishing marks of the presiding deity of the Srīvidyā tantra. Lalitā-Mahā - Tripurasundarī, Kāmeśvarī, these are her names. If we do not go "technically" too far into the subject, she is also to be understood as Rājarājeśvarī. Ambikā in this form has four hands—the upper two bear the noose and the goad, the lower two the bow and the arrows. The bow and the arrows are the same as Manmatha's: sugarcane and flowers. "Rāga" and "dveṣa", love and hate, are two urges, likes and dislikes; what you accept and what you reject. If you think deeply about the subject you will realise that all worldly life is enfolded by these two urges. Rāga and dveṣa are also understood to be kāma and krodha, desire and anger. Both must be kept under restraint. The two are the products of Ambā's sport of Māyā and they disappear in her sport of grace (anugraha līlā). If we keep reminding ourselves of this we shall be able to hold them in check. "Rāga-svarūpa-pāśāḍhyā", one with the noose that is desire. "Krodhākārāṅkuśojjvālā", one who shines with the goad that is anger: these names occur in the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam.*

Of kāma and krodha, Ambā's noose symbolises kāma or desire. "Pāśa" means rope or noose. The noose that Yama casts is known as "Yama-pāśa". We say that "āśā" (desire) is also a "pāśa". Āśā is kāma. Like a noose āśā or desire keeps us bound. The goad symbolises krodha or anger. Anger is like the goad that pierces you, provokes you. Yes, it pierces you, not someone else. The other man may ignore our anger but we hurt ourselves with it, keep creating a sore with the goad of anger. Modern scientists speak of the energy wasted in anger. They also speak of another interesting aspect of it and it is in agreement with the śāstras: if we waste our energy fuming in anger about what we do not like, we waste more energy when we are happily involved in what we are fond of, that is kāma. Kāma is what is called "hita-śatru"; pretending to do us good it digs our grave.

Mention of the goad (ankuśa) reminds me of the elephant. The noose (pāśa) is also associated with that animal. The elephant has always to be kept in chains. That chain is pāśa. Kāma and krodha are indeed elephantine in proportion: that is why they are shown to be kept under check by pāśānkuśa (by the noose and the goad). What do we mean by saying that desire and anger are kept under check? It means nothing but keeping the mind under control, the mind in which the two (kāma and krodha) sprout. In his *Śivānandalaharī,* the Ācarya likens the mind to an elephant in rut: "hṛdaya madebham" (mada-ibham = an elephant in rut).

An explanation for Ambā bearing the noose and the goad in her hands : even this is her sport and an important aspect of her Māyā. Another explanation: she places her affection (pāśa) in us, binds us with the pāśa or noose in her hand, drags us away from the other pāśas that bind us—and when she does so we hug her with affection, crying, "Mother". She gives us the "attachment that is free from attachments". Likewise she directs her anger against our anger, pierces our anger with the goad that symbolises anger, subdues it and makes it calm.

In the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam,* the bow and the arrows are mentioned after the noose and the goad. Usually we say "dhanur-bāṇa-pāśānkuśam". However, in the *Sahasranāmam* the pāśa and ankuśa are mentioned first and then only the bow and the arrows. This order appears to be reasonable. The bow and the arrows are important chiefly for Manmatha, are they not? If the same are mentioned for Ambā her importance will not be known. Besides, though Manmatha is apparently responsible for creation and our bondage the true cause behind both is Ambā. When the two weapons are in her hands, we must not forget that she is the one who also frees us from bondage. When Manmatha's bow and arrows change places and go into her hands they stand for release from bondage—I shall come to this subject later. If the two were to be mentioned first the impression might be created that she is a copy of Manmatha. It is because such an impression must not be created that the noose and the goad are first mentioned in her case, the noose and the goad that are specially meant for forms of Ambā like Bhuvaneśvarī. The sugarcane and the flower arrows are assigned to śṛṅgāra or the erotic which is among the many types of kāma (śṛngāra is the most powerful of them and makes a man slip and fall); the noose is assigned for the rest of the types of kāma; and for the force which is the opposite of kāma, anger, is assigned the goad.

Krodha or anger is āśā or desire unrequited. If we fail in anything we become angry. [Failure gives rise to anger.] If you interpret āśā as attachment for Ambā, and krodha or anger as anger against anger, the noose and goad will become the means of release from bondage. In this way the concept of Ambā is fully expressed.

After mentioning pāśā for rāga, (the noose for desire), and aṅkuśa for krodha, (the goad for anger), the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam* mentions two names based on the bow and arrows Ambā carries in her hands—"Manorupekṣu-kodaṇḍā" and "Pañca-tanmātra-sāyakā", "the symbol of the mind that is the sugarcane bow" and "the one with the arrows that are symbols of the five tanmātras". "Tanmātras" here must be understood as the five senses that enjoy the tanmātras.

Manmatha has only two weapons in his hands. And Ambā too carries the same weapons to proclaim to the world that it is she as Akhilāṇḍa-Cakravartinī, the queen-empress of the entire cosmos, who has appointed him as the authority to create carnal pleasure in the world. Not only that. I spoke about the noose and the goad signifying bondage and liberation. The same is to be said about the bow and the arrows too. When they are in the hands of Manmatha, the bow thrusts the minds of men into carnal pleasure while the arrows of flowers cast them into the trap of the five senses. But when they are in the hands of Ambā, what do they do? The bow draws our minds into desire for liberation and the five arrows too have the same purpose—they turn our five senses towards Ambā and purify them. They create the desire in us to listen to songs sung in her praise, to touch her lotus feet, to behold her form, to taste the ambrosia that the water laving her feet is and to gather her nirmālya^g flowers and experience their divine fragrance. When the bow and arrows are with Manmatha they excite our minds and senses and involve us in carnal pleasure. But when the same are in the hands of Ambā they turn our minds and senses towards her, towards Ambā who is not only the cause of carnal pleasure but also of eternal happiness. The same weapons when they change hands have different uses. The robber points the knife at us threatening to finish us off. But when the same knife comes to our hands he takes to his heels.

When the sugarcane bow and the flower arrows are in the hands of Manmatha, the juice of the sugarcane and the nectar of the flowers flow as kāmarasa to delude the world and ensnare it in carnal pleasure. The same weapons in the hands of Ambā create a flow of the rasa of her compassion. And, correspondingly, devotion for her, the Mother, wells up in our hearts. In the flow of her compassion and our devotion, we forget ourselves and experience the bliss of liberation. What keeps us in delusion is Māyā—-it is very bad. What makes us forget ourselves is jñāna—-the highest of all that is good.

In short, the flower arrows of Ambā annihilate our sensual urges and her sugarcane bow eradicates our mind. When this happens we realise jñāna, liberation. Do we need to have anything more?

It is customary to say that the five senses that are purified by the five arrows and the mind that is cleansed by the sugarcane bow together form the six karaṇas. Just as the honey-bee has six legs an individual has six karaṇas. Our life is like a bee with six karaṇas and caraṇas and just as a bee becomes embedded in a lotus so our Self should become absorbed in the lotus feet of Ambā. So the Ācārya says (in Stanza 90) : "Nimajjan majjīvaḥ karaṇacaraṇaḥ ṣaḍcaraṇatām."

A point to be noted is this. It is not stated in the stanza that our senses and our mind must be tamed by Ambā's bow and arrows. They must be brought to subjection at her feet. "You need not grant me refuge or give me boons with your hands. Your feet themselves will do the same for me," the Ācārya says in an earlier verse. Here (in Stanza 7, beginning with the words "kvaṇat kāñcīdāmā") instead of the hands held in the vara and abhaya mudras, he has mentioned the bow and arrows borne by them. The functions performed by them of doing away with the mind and the senses, will they not be performed by Ambā's lotus feet? It is in answer to this that the Ācārya says later that the bee that stands for the mind and the senses will become embedded in her lotus feet. Our desire and anger that are subdued by her noose and goad will also be held in check if we clasp her feet.

The question arises: why should Ambā have four hands? It is precisely because she is beautiful to behold in her form with the four hands. Apart from being beautiful she is also the queen-empress. It is to denote her majesty that she has the bow and arrows in the other hands. A king (or a hero) is usually depicted with bow and arrows—-for instance, Rāma and Arjuna. They are weapons to attack foes who are far away. Military science itself is called dhanurveda. That is why the great, great, queen Ambā is chiefly represented with bow and arrows.

Ambā is the queen of the empire of jñāna. To indicate that she is the one who liberates she is shown with her other two hands carrying the noose and the goad, the weapons that create jñāna by destroying desire and anger (rāga and dveṣa).

It is to show that she herself draws away the mind and the senses — the mind and the senses that we should ourselves offer at her feet— that she keeps the bow and arrows in her hands. It is as if she lifts us up with her hand saying, "Why should the child fall at my feet?"

With the bow and arrows, Ambā turned Īśvara, who was all jñāna, towards kāma for the well-being of the world and to make him the embodiment of the sport of grace and she hersell became Śivakāmasundarī. It is with the same weapons that she protects all mankind by holding their minds and senses in her hands. This idea is expressed here like a dhyāna-śloka[8]. The Ācārya concludes by saying that the functions performed by the bow and arrows are performed by Ambā's feet.

Let me explain. Each weapon has a particular power. But what is the source of this power? The source is Ambā, the power is what is granted by her. We who have no strength of our own need weapons for success in battles. As for Ambā she possesses all strength and is indeed the source of all strength. The weapons carry out her resolve receiving that strength of hers in the manner and measure determined by her. Although her mere resolve is enough to accomplish a task it is as a sport and for the joy to be derived from it that she carries it out through these weapons or other instruments.

It would be enough to hold her feet : by her resolve born of her compassion she would give us her blessings whether it is for freedom from fear, the acquiring of any boons, eradication of the mind and the senses, whatever. But for the sake of sport she would seem to carry out our wishes through her weapons or hand gestures—or she may not do so. What others do with these weapons she may do the opposite [when they are in her hands].

If Parameśvara were to remain in quietude as a jñānin the world would not go on and the divine sport would not be conducted. That is why when Kāma met with failure (that is when his efforts to inspire desire in Śiva did not succeed) Ambā wielded her bow and arrows and by attracting Śiva towards herself brought him into the sphere of divine sport. Apart from that, carrying the same weapons, she made Śiva himself the deity of śṛṅgāra. Then she restored Kāma to life and gave him again the authority to inspire kāma in all sentient beings. But still she retained these weapons with herself.

But now she changed the functions of the weapons. The weapons that draw the senses and the mind into carnal pleasure, she began to use them to draw people unto herself. People have to experience kāma and other pleasures according to their karma and for this purpose she gave the weapons to Manmatha. But they should not keep their burden of karma growing and they must return to her (become liberated). It is for this purpose that she bears the weapons in her hands (she uses them to draw people unto herself).

So, though she carries the weapons of Manmatha, she creates kāma only in Manmathari (that is Paramaśiva, the enemy of Manmatha). For others she brings release from kāma. She is Śivakāmasundarī only for Śiva who is jñāna incarnate: for her devotees she is Jñānāmbā. As for Manmatha, with the same weapons he drags all sentient beings into carnal pleasure. But he is powerless before Īśvara who reduced him to ashes.

The Ācārya first portrays Ambā's form, her four hands, her thin waste adorned with the girdle and her face that is like the autumnal full moon. After describing her physical form, he speaks about the inward truth of Ambā, the "essence" of the Ambā concept: "Puramathituḥ Āhopuriṣikā". Superficially the words mean: "The embodiment of the pride of the destroyer of Tripura". Considered a little more deeply, the words would mean that Ambā is the embodiment of his, Siva's, "I feeling". Though Ambā bears the same weapons as Kāma, the bow and the arrows, she is indeed the citśakti of the Parabrahman, truly Jñānāmbā. I have already spoken about it.

"Purastād āstām." "May she shine in front of us." "May the one who wears the tingling girdle round her delicate waist, the one whose face is like the autumnal full moon, and the one who bears in her hands the bow and arrows and the noose and the goad—-the one who is the embodiment of Paramaśiva's parāhantā—-may she reveal herself before us," says the Ācārya. She must shine in front of all of us, so he prays. Not in front of "me" alone. He prays on behalf of all of us. "Purastād āstām naḥ." "Nah" means "us", not "me".

It is for us to see her with our mind's eye that the Ācārya has portrayed her so beautifully in this stanza.

Ambā has some more distinguishing features: the crescent moon on her head, the eye in the forehead, the Pañcabrahmāsana. I forgot to mention the most important: she looks radiant in her complexion of red. These are dealt with in some of the subsequent stanzas. But, even without the mention of such distinguishing marks, we see clearly from the stanza who the deity of the hymn is.

The Ācārya describes the residence of Lalitāmbā in the next stanza. *Abhirāmī Antādi* is also about Lalitāmbā. The (Tirukkaḍavūr) Abhirāmī does not bear in her hands the bow and arrows and the noose and the goad. She is, according to the tradition of Cola art, seen with the hand gestures of vara and abhaya, with the puṇḍarīka and the akṣamālā (rosary). But it was Lalitāmbikā [with the distinguishing features mentioned above] who revealed herself before Abhirāmībhaṭṭa. In the *Antādi* in the second stanza—it is like a dhyāna-śloka—he has described Ambā as carrying the bow and arrows and the noose and the goad. In the concluding stanzas also he speaks of these characteristics.

Notes & References

[1] Vessel whose contents are inexhaustible. The word is especially used for a pot containing food.

[2] *"Arai nāzhi nel koṇḍe eṉ nānku aram iyaṟṟināl."* "She performed the 32 dharmas with one-eighth of a measure of paddy".

[3] One-eighth of a measure.

[4] *"Unpādu nāzhi, uḍuppadu nālu muzham."* "Eating one-eighth of a measure of food, wearing cloth of four cubits".

[5] Kanyākumārī, Mīnākṣī, Akhilāṇḍeśvarī, Dharmasamvardhini, Kamalāmbā, Bālāmbā, Śivakāmasundarī—Tamiḷ Nāḍu; Bhagavatī-- Keraḷa; Cāmuṇḍeśvarī, Śāradāmbā — Karṇāṭaka; Jñānāmbā, Bhramarāmbā, Kanakadurgā — Āndhra Pradeś; Tulaja Bhavānī—Mahārāṣtra; Ambāji—Gujarāt; Annapūrṇeśvarī, Vindhyāvāsinī — Uttar Pradeś; Vaiṣṇavi—Kāśmīr.

[6] *"Tudiyidai koḍiyidai."* "Waist slender like a creeper."

Chapter 47

Ambikā's Residence

Sudhāsindhor-madhye suraviṭapi-vāṭī-parivṛte
Maṇidvīpe nīpopavanavati cintāmaṇi-gṛhe
Śivākāre mañce Paramaśiva-paryaṅkanilayāṁ
Bhajanti tvām dhanyāḥ katicana cidānandalaharīm

The abode of Śiva is Kailāsa and of Viṣṇu Vaikuṇṭha. Similarly, Lalitāmbā has a world of her own. Śiva and Viṣṇu have only one abode; Lalitāmbā has two residences. One is in what is called Brahmāṇḍa and on one of the peaks of Meru round which all the planets revolve. On the three other peaks of Meru are Brahmaloka, Viṣṇuloka and Śivaloka. Ambā's world, it is said, is in the centre of these three peaks, on the reigning peak so to speak. This is referred to in the name "Sumerumadhyaśṛṅgasthā" occurring in the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam.* Ambā's second abode (second world) is outside Brahmāṇḍa. She has created a vast ocean of ambrosia and in the midst of it she resides on an island. In the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam*, after this residence in the ocean of ambrosia is referred to, occurs the name "Kāmākśī":"Sudhā-sāgara-madhyasthā", "Kāmāksī", "Kāmadāyinī". It is this abode that the Ācārya describes here [in Stanza 8]. This is the world (as already mentioned) created by Ambā herself. The one on Meru's central peak was built by the celestial carpenter Viśvakarmā with the power granted to him by Ambā. Ambā appeared once to slay Bhaṇḍāsura, an enemy of the celestials. At once the celestials exclaimed: "She indeed is our queen Rājarājeśvarī." Then they performed her coronation. Viśvakarmā built a palace for the queen with many fortresses on the Meru peak, a Śrīpura. However, what the Ācārya describes here is the Śrīpura in the ocean of ambrosia.

Whether it is on the central Meru peak or in the ocean of ambrosia there is no difference between the two abodes of Ambā. From the outermost fortress to the palace proper—where she is seated in regal splendour—-the prākāras, the lakes, the entourages are the same. This capital of hers is called Śrīpura or Śrīnagara. It is encircled by twentyfive fortresses and prākāras. The fortresses are built of metals ranging from iron to gold and of the nine gems. Then, proceeding further in degrees of subtlety, there are fortresses of the mind, of intelligence, of ego. Lastly there are strongholds built each of the radiance of the sun, the radiance of the moon and of the lustre of Manmatha. Between the fortresses there are forests, parks of divine trees and streams and canals. When going past all these, in the twenty-fifth āvaraṇa—-same as prākāra—is the Mahāpadmavana, a canal full of lotuses. It is like a moat and in it is Ambā's palace, built not of red bricks but of Cintāmaṇis[1].

The queen residing in the palace is Rājarājeśvarī. When we view her thus she conducts her *durbār* seated on the throne in the royal assembly. As mentioned earlier the four legs and the seat of her throne are the Pañcabrahmas. From this throne, seated on the lap of Kāmeśvara, she holds court. When we view her not as one in a position of authority, not as a queen, but as one embodying the śṛṅgāra that turned the Brahman into sport, she gives *darshan* not in the open royal assembly but in her inner apartment, all by herself. To obtain that *darshan* we must eradicate our senses totally. To qualify for it we must grasp the inner meaning of śṛṅgāra, and we must indeed have the maturity to become immersed in this meaning. The Pañcabrahmāsana, the throne in the royal assembly, is now in her inner apartment, a couch on which she is seated with Kāmeśvara.

In the Śrīpura, on the central peak of Meru, she is the queen conducting her royal assembly and she is higher than all the celestials. In the centre of the ocean of ambrosia she is Mother, the pativratā[g] consort of Kāmeśvara for seekers belonging to a high plane. She is Mother and Father in one and her blessings will be such as to take us so far as to bring about our union as children with this Mother-Father entity.

The Ācārya describes briefly [in this eighth stanza] the residence of Ambā, starting from the ocean of ambrosia to the lap of Kāmeśvara.

[The Great Master appears to turn over in his mind the stanza word by word. He now explains its meaning.]

In the centre of the ocean of ambrosia...There are five trees notable in the celestial world: mandāra, pārijāta, santāna, kalpaka, and haricandana. The island, called Maṇidvīpa, has forests of such trees. The earth here is not soil or stone but all precious gems. That is why the island is called "Maṇidvīpa".

Here, in Maṇidvīpa, is the garden that is full of nīpa trees—-nīpa is the same as kadamba[2]... Madhura (Madurai) which is a place dear to Ambā was once a kadamba forest. In Tamiḷ the tree is called *"kaḍaṁbaṁ"*. Muruga is very fond of it. In fact in Tamiḷ texts he himself is called *"Kaḍaṁban"*. In Maṇidvīpa there is a garden of kadamba trees. "Kadaṁbavana-vasinīm", "Kadaṁbavana-cāriṇīm" ["Kadaṁbavana-śālayā", "Kadaṁbavana-madhyakām"]: the Ācarya has composed a hymn using such words in line after line[3]. Even children taught these verses would love to learn them and recite them. Ambā roams in the kadamba forest joyfully. In Madurai it is a kadamba forest, in Maṇidvīpa it is a kadamba upavana. "Upavana" is a small forest, a man-made park. At the edge of the island it is a forest of divine trees, and as we approach the palace it is a kadamba park that we see.

To build towns and townships everywhere we cut down trees indiscriminately. Later we realise that human life itself is threatened in the absence of trees and we observe "Vanamahotsava". We celebrate this utsava or festival merely on paper—-so it seems to me. In the old days, when there were not so many towns, there were parks on the outskirts of all places. A capital city with a fortress would certainly have such a garden. Apart from preventing an "upset" in nature, it protected the place from enemy forces.

The palace of Ambā is situated in the park of nīpa trees and it glitters having been built entirely of Cintāmaṇis. If all our thoughts were made into gems, if we were to think of Ambā alone and each thought of ours were a gem [a gem of a thought] and if we built a temple to her with these gems, it would also be a Cintāmaṇi house. And she would reside in it—-that is reside in our thoughts. It is as a way to it, for Ambā to dwell in us, that we first meditate on her as one who dwells outside of us. In the end she must reside in us. Abhirāmibhaṭṭa asks, "Is your temple here or there? Is it in my heart?" He also says in one of his songs[5]: "She who is One unfolded herself into many and pervaded the entire world. Then, when the world became extinct, she became the form of the Ātman. Such a one, such a Great One, dwells somehow in my tiny heart."

In the mansion built of Cintāmaṇis Ambā is seated on the couch that has the form of Śiva. I spoke to you earlier of the Pañcabrahmāsana. Upon the five (Pañcabrahma) is Kāmeśvara or Paramaśiva who personifies the Parabrahman and on his lap is seated Ambā, that is on "Paramaśiva paryaṅka". The word "aṅka" by itself means "lap". "Paryaṅka" denotes a number of things: bed, bedstead, cloth worn round the hip, and the lap. It also means "covered litter". From it is derived "palanquin" and (the Tamil) *pallakku.* There was a distinguished scholar and devotee of Śiva called Vainagaram Rāmanāthan Ceṭṭiyār. He said that *"pallakku"* was derived from *"pal akku"* that is from *"pala aksaṅgal"* (many akṣas or eyes). A man carried in a palanquin will be the cynosure of all eyes (or *pala akṣaṅgal*). Hence the vehicle itself came to be called *"pallakku".* Such was the ingenious explanation of the Ceṭṭiyār[6]. In truth it is "paryaṅka" from which *"pallankam"* and *"pallakku"* are derived.

The bed that is the lap of Kāmeśvara is the paryaṅka of Ambā.

The Ācārya does not call the one seated on the paryaṅka Kāmeśvarī, Rājarājeśvarī or Śṛṅgārasundarī. He elevates her to the heights of jñāna by giving her the name of "Cidānandalaharī". This is what is great about the Ācārya's literary genius. Even though Ambā is with the Lord as śṛṅgāra personified what is denoted is Ātma-śṛṅgāra. Is it not the bliss of love, the cascading joy of the consciousness that is not separated from the Truth? Being seated on this or that seat, being in this or that world or in this or that house is in fact the flow of the bliss of consciousness—this is the idea with which the Ācārya concludes the stanza.

A few fortunate people, the Ācārya says, worship "you who are the flood of the bliss of consciousness in such a residence." "Bhajante tvām dhanyāḥ katicana". In prose order the same is: "Katicana dhanyāḥ tvām bhajante." It means, "A few fortunate people worship you."

Why only "a few"? Are there not many people who perform pūjā to Devī? Their number is increasing day by day. But mumbling some words and burning camphor, would that be pūjā in the true sense?

Then what is true pūjā?

Did I not describe Ambā's form in the previous stanza? We must visualise that form and have it imprinted in our hearts. We must also imagine that we too live in Ambā's residence just described. We must imagine that her grace is the ocean of ambrosia and the forest of Kalpaka trees surrounding us, that in her grace our earth has become gem-encrusted, that our pūjā room is built of the Cintāmaṇis that grant us all our wishes. This is what is called "sālokya mokṣa". It is generally believed that going to the world of our chosen deity is sālokya mokṣa. It seems to me that even better than this is to think that the place where we live, wherever it be, is the world of our chosen deity.

Beyond sālokyam is "sāmīpyam" (that is to go near, or close to, our chosen deity). To proceed from the shores of the ocean of ambrosia *via* the forest, park and so on to Ambā's bedstead in her palace is sāmīpyam.

Further to sālokyam and sāmīpyam is "sārūpyam". Just as the worm constantly thinking of the wasp becomes a wasp, so if we keep contemplating Ambā's form we too will become that form. We must become absorbed in the description of Ambā's form contained in the previous stanza and meditate on that form visualising her as seated on the lap of Paramaśiva. This will lead to our sārūpya liberation.

The ultimate in liberation is sāyujya, becoming one with our chosen deity. That is, apart from being identical in form with the deity, we become one with that deity, become the same Truth as that deity. It is this Truth that the Ācārya calls "cidānandalaharī", the flow of consciousness that is the infinite bliss. We must become dissolved in that lahari : this is sāyujya. After this there is no pūjā for us to perform. Until we continue to be in the state in which we have to perform pūjā we must cultivate the attitude of dissolving non-dualistically in the cidānandalaharī.

Reaching Ambā's world, beholding her form, becoming dissolved in the Reality that she is: let these happen in due time. But now itself we must mentally attune ourselves to these states (of sālokya, sāmīpya, sārūpya and sāyujya). When we sit down to perform pūjā our mind must be fully engrossed in her. "Is it already late for our office? What sort of *vaḍa* will they make in the canteen?" Such thoughts must not distract you. Your mind must be immersed in the waves of the ocean of ambrosia and finally in the Reality that Ambā is, the flood of the ocean of cidānanda, the bliss of consciousness.

Do we perform pūjā in this manner? Perhaps a few of us do. Only those who have earned merit by their past actions perform pūjā with such intensity as to realise cidānanda rasa in her form. The Ācārya has referred to these very few fortunate people, "katicana dhanyāḥ".

Notes & References

1 Descriptions of Śrīpura are seen in the *Āryā-Dviśatī* of Durvāsas and in the *Lalitopākhyānam.*

2 Kadaṁba or nīpa: *Anthocephalus Indicus or Nauclia kadamb.*

3 *Tripurasaundaryāṣṭakam.*

4 *Abhirāmī Antādi,* song 20.

5 Song 56 of the same.

6 It was in 1926 when the Great Guru was in Kaḍiyāpaṭṭi that the Ceṭṭiyār said this. When the Master, after being taken in procession in a palanquin, returned to his camp it was past midnight. He wondered why he could not see the Ceṭṭiyār during the procession. The latter then said that he had been one of the palanquin-bearers and that that was why the Great Guru could not notice him. The Ceṭṭiyār composed five stanzas on the Great Svāmī in which he gave his own etymology of the word *pallakku.*

Chapter 48

In the Kuṇḍalinī Form

The worship of Ambā through Kuṇḍalinī yoga and through mantra yoga and the fruits yielded by such forms of worship are mentioned in some of the subsequent stanzas.

Six cakras[8] in the human body, also called lotuses, are mentioned in Kuṇḍalinī yoga. The Ācārya says that Ambā resides in these cakras: in the first five cakras, in the ascending order, as the five tattvas from earth to space and as mind in the sixth. Through the lotuses runs the suṣumnā-nāḍi at the upper end of which is the one-thousand-petalled sahasrāra lotus in which Ambā becomes united with her husband Śiva. This means that when the individual Self is brought by the force of Kuṇḍalinī to merge here (in the sahasrāra) Ambā grants it non-dualistic bliss. This is mentioned in the next stanza (9). "What is in the macrocosm is in the microcosm." When Ambā unfolds herself as the prapañca or cosmos, what exists in it as the mahābhūtas and the mahat which is the mahāmanas that orders the worlds in it—if one practises yoga these can be experienced in one's Kuṇḍalinī cakras. The mahamanas unites in the sahasradala lotus with the Brahman that is Śiva and one obtains non-dual realization.

The experience of Advaitik rasa becoming the experience of amṛta rasa is dealt with in the next stanza (10). The rasa of realising Advaita, Ambā who grants it and the individual Self who receives it : there is no difference between the three. This phenomenon is beyond description and it is only as a formality that it is called "rasānubhava" (experiencing the rasa). However, before it happens and after it happens, there is a state approximating to that experience and there are three entities in it—the rasa, the one who provides it and the one who receives it. I spoke about lotuses. They are not like the lotuses growing in a pond. The lotuses of our ponds bloom only in the sun. In moonlight they fold. The warmth of fire will make them wilt. But these Kuṇḍalinī lotuses bloom in the Kaṇḍas,[1] the Agni Kaṇḍa, the Sun Kaṇḍa and the Moon Kaṇḍa. In the end, there is in the head the full moon that makes the sahasrāra-padma (the one-thousand-petalled lotus) blossom. From it will flow ambrosia as moonlight. That is what is called rasa and it is provided by Ambā.

On the face of the moon Ambā's divine feet will appear as the feet of our sadguru. It is from them indeed that ambrosia flows. The same is shown as if it were made to flow by the moon. The individual Self is the one that receives that ambrosia, the one that knows that ambrosia. But the non-dualistic feeling will be there that it is Ambā who is at once the rasa and the one who experiences that rasa.

Note

[1] Kaṇḍas:sections, regions.

Chapter 49

Whatever Path You Follow...

"He [that is the Mahāsvamī] says that he won't have anything to do with Kuṇḍalinī, and at the same time he wouldn't allow us also to become interested in it. Then how are we going to obtain all the wonderful experience provided by the practice of Kuṇḍalinī yoga? He need not have spoken about the subject at all."

[The Mahāguru's own answer to this.] Kuṇḍalinī yoga is not the only path available to the seeker. Choose any path other than it, adhere to it with a mind that is one-pointed and with faith and sincerity. As you advance to a high state on this path your breathing will change automatically and it will be similar to that of one practising yoga. You may not even be aware of it; the breathing will change on its own [without any effort on your part]. Ordinarily, when we are engaged in worldly work, we breathe through the left nostril. But when we are witnessing a religious festival, when we are happy or when we are in the presence of a great man, our mind is at peace and during this time we breathe through the right nostril. When we go higher on our path we will breathe through both our nostrils and when we go still higher we will stop breathing, that is we will be retaining our breath in what is called "kumbhaka". But this does not mean that we will be gasping for breath. We will be feeling easy, feeling light.

Thus the movement of breath will change on its own. Finally (in our quest), in the state before Advaitik realisation, the movement of breath will impinge on the nerves in the roof of our head and, touching the feet of Ambā, create a flow of ambrosia. Even in worldly life when we are in an ecstasy of delight our breathing stops and we faint. In this there is a reflection of the emotion experienced by us during kuṁbhạka. During this time we exclaim: "Ah, I feel cool in the crown of my head." This also means that a tiny droplet of the ambrosia has trickled down on the nerves in the crown of the head.

I have said this to show that even by following the path of devotion you can have inward experience of a sublime nature.

If we listen to the songs of those who followed exclusively the way of devotion, among them not only the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava devotees of Tamiḷ Nāḍu but also the devotees of Mahārāṣṭra, Beṅgāl, Northern India, the Sūfis and Christian mystics, we will discern in them [in the songs of these devotees and mystics] flashes of their perception of yoga and jñāna.

Here we must speak of the experience of love also. Icchāśakti, the power of desire, which underlies the basic concept of Kāmeśvara and Kāmeśvarī, belongs to the realm of love (śṛṅgāra) that is pure and subtle in nature. The word kāma itself is a source of embarrassment for us, for a guru or sannyāsin, and to speak about it before a public gathering seems improper.[1] However, there is nothing wrong in dealing with it as a concept governing all life. All creation is based on a peaceful basis; it is power that goes on braiding everything together and this is made known symbolically. There is nothing wrong in it. That is why at the end of their spiritual practice Ambā has made it possible for seekers to obtain the experience of śṛṅgāra in the same way as the experience they have at the end of their quest of yoga or jñāna. If in the evolution of the Root principle (the Brahman) there appears icchā or desire during the stage of involution [the individual Self becoming the Brahman] many great men, before becoming one with the Root principle, have experienced the nayikā bhāva —- the feelings of the nāyikā [that is the seeker regards himself as the bride of the deity]. In this stage of involution, one is united with Śakti. Then there is the burning desire to become one with the nāyaka that is Śiva. In that desire, in the intensity of that feeling, the seeker surrenders to the nāyaka, that is Śiva, telling himself, "I have nothing to do on my own. It is all your wish." Later even this desire to become united with Śiva ceases and there remains only the icchā or desire of Śiva alone. Which means the involution accomplished by the seeker through his efforts merges in the first stage of Śiva's evolution. In that moment as far as the seeker is concerned Śiva, instead of unfolding himself in evolution, receives him within himself in an act of involution. Ordinarily if you throw an object into a stream it is, in the course of its flow, cast ashore, but if there is an undercurrent in the stream it will draw the object in. The latter is the case with the individual Self referred to above.

The initial desire of Śiva, the final desire of the seeker: the two take the symbolic form of śṛṅgāra, love. This we know from the songs of great men belonging to all religions. We find parallels of this love in the utterances of Sūfis, Christian mystics, in the songs of Māṇikkavācakar[8] and Mīrābai. The experience of yoga, jñāna and love is common to all.

Though icchā or desire spoken of here is that of Śiva and that of the seeker, the one who causes the pulsation of the consciousness [to produce the desire] is Ambā. The fact of Śiva drawing the individual Self [the seeker] unto himself is also her act.

I spoke that in devotion itself one obtains the same experience as that of yoga, an experience of a lofty nature. Instead of seeking accomplishment through yoga and tantra, it would be enough if we, realising that such are beyond our capacity, become engaged in devotion with love, telling overselves, "Let us surrender to Parāśakti. She is our only refuge." There would then be no room for self-pride arising from the feeling that "we are engaged in a great sādhana". Mother herself will lift us up and make it possible for us to experience the highest bliss.

In the *Lalītā-Sahasranāmam* [in the context of the lotus of one thousand petals referred to earlier] it is mentioned that when the life-force, prāṇa-śakti, joins the sahasrāra, there is the radiance of the full moon as well as the flow of ambrosia. There is no need to lament that we (those who do not practise Kuṇḍalinī yoga) are denied the experience of this kind. We saw earlier the words, "pariṇata-śaraccandra-vadanā" (Stanza 7). It would be enough if we keep thinking of Ambā's face which is like the full moon. It would be enough if we think of the nectar flowing from her sidelong glance and her gentle smile. What we keep thinking about she would make a reality and she would bring us realisation of the inner moon and the inner flow of nectar.

Those who have the strength and the capacity for it, let them take to Kuṇḍalinī yoga. For us there is the easy way of devotion, with unflinching faith in the Mother. She will afford us all those blessings that are made available to the practitioners of Kuṇḍalinī yoga. She may, after a stage, even take us to the way of Kuṇḍalinī yoga and bless us with its rewards. On the other hand, she may push aside those engaged in arduous yoga, telling them, "Enough of all this," and bid them to surrender to her.

We must consider how the Ācārya concludes the stanza in which he speaks about the way Ambā makes ambrosia flow in the nāḍis. She who raises the soul force into the head, instead of uniting the individual Self with herself, makes that power descend again from one cakra into another and with her strength all reduced she remains asleep, coiled up, in the mūlādhāra cakra.

The word "kuṇḍalinī" suggests the "coiled up" position during sleep. Like a "kuṇḍala", ear-ring, the snake that is asleep is all coiled up. When we sleep soundly we stretch our hands and legs fully. Though now and then we sleep crouching or keep tossing in bed, when we are dead asleep our body is fully stretched. But animals, from the cat to the elephant, sleep with the body somewhat bent [crouching], with the head resting on the forelegs. When it is asleep the snake crouches itself in the form of a coil. Only a minuscule fraction of Parāśakti's power is revealed in us: the rest is inactive and is given the name of Kuṇḍalinī since it remains twisting itself in the mūlādhāra like a sleeping serpent. According to legend, the snake sustains itself on air: hence it is called "pavanāśī" ["pavana" = air, wind + "aś", to eat]. Since we retain our vital prāṅik power by taking in the air, it [the prāṅik power] is called a snake.

Let that be. The Ācārya, who speaks of the seeker having the near-Advaitik experience of tasting the ambrosia, refers at the same time to Ambā making a sudden descent into the form of a sleeping serpent, denoting our state of being unwise and uncultivated. Also to be noted is that she may push down yogins, who have tasted the ambrosia but are boastful about their "great yogic prowess". So even for those who practise Kuṇḍalinī yoga the ultimate key to the door of liberation is surrender, the humility that comes of the realisation, "Not I, but you".

Note

[1] "Asabhyam" is the word used here by the Mahāguru. It means words not fit to be spoken in a sabhā, in an assembly. It means the same as "unparliamentary".

Chapter 50

The Śrīcakra and its Greatness

In the next stanza (11) the Ācārya describes the Śrīcakra. The Śrīcakra is also known as the Śrīyantra. Mention of "Śrīvidyā-pūjā" evokes the question, "Is this pūjā performed after installing the Śrīcakra?" The answer is "Yes". Each deity has a yantra of his/her own. But those who perform pūjā to Śiva or Viṣṇu do not generally do so with yantras. In temples, perhaps, the appropriate yantra is installed in the earth beneath the idol. In some temples the yantra is installed outside, but not in residential houses. Many perform pūjā to Śiva and Viṣṇu with a bāṇa and sālagrāma respectively. In the Pañcāyatana pūjā[1] Ambā is symbolised by the stone called "svarṇa-rekhā-śilā" which is found in nature. But it is rarely that people perform pūjā with it. Those who worship Subrahmaṇya have a small spear to represent him. But most deities are worshipped either with icons or stones found in nature. For Ambā alone is there the Śrīcakra. It has also become customary, to a small extent, to worship Ambā with an icon and the Śrīcakra.

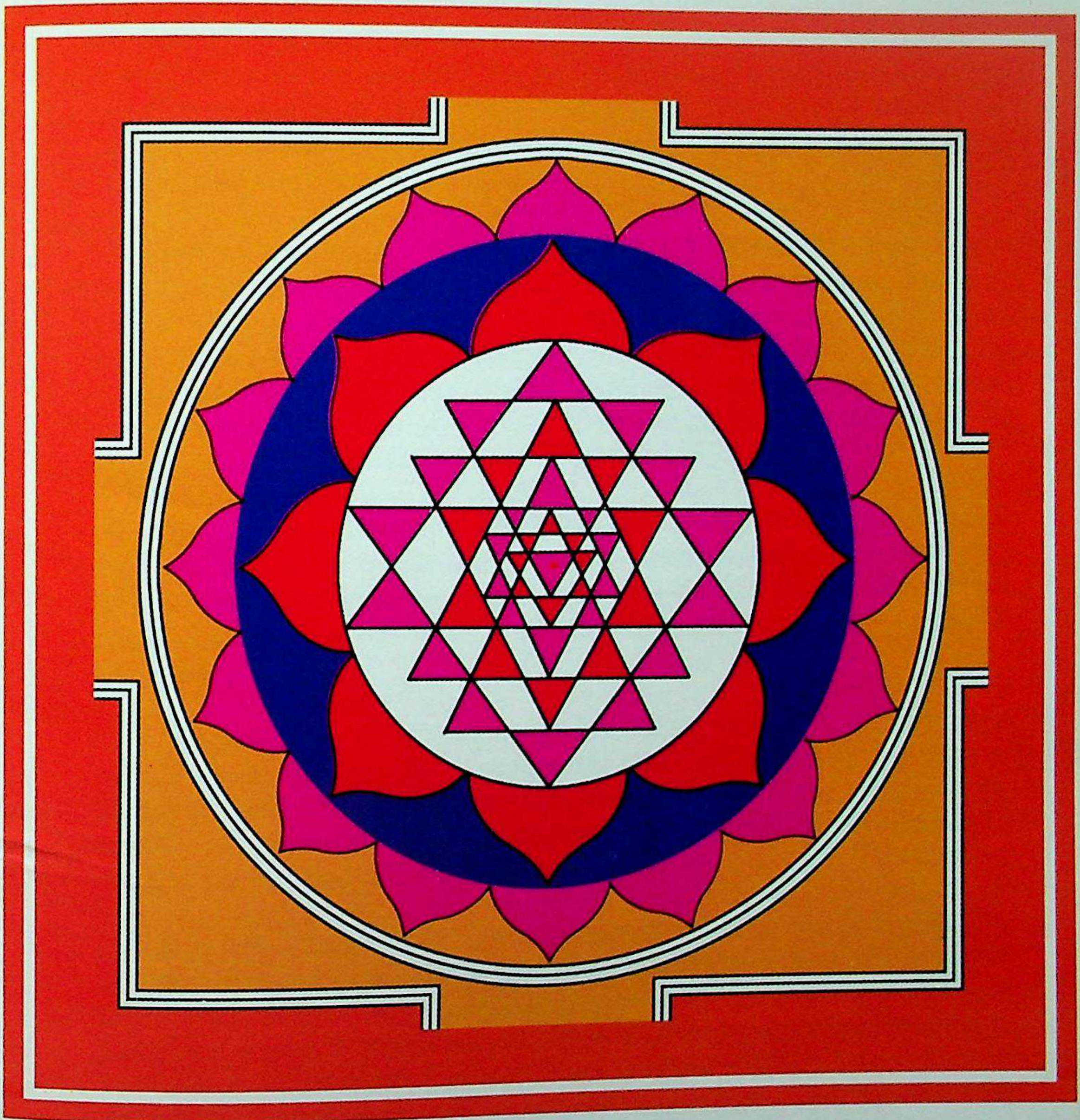
If you take the tantra pertaining to any deity you will find that there is a mantra as well as a yantra for the same. If you keep chanting sounds (syllables) arranged in a particular sequence and acquire perfection in doing so you will come face to face with the deity concerned. Such a sequence of sounds is what is called the mantra for a particular deity. Like the hands and feet and other parts of a deity, the group of syllables that invokes him/her also constitutes his/her form — it is a sound form or a mantra form. Along with this the deity has a yantra form [a diagrammatic form]. Each part of the yantra, whether it be lines, angles or circles, has not only a meaning of its own but also immense power. Each yantra is a means to grasp the Paramātman in his manifestation as a particular deity. A mantra, apart from being muttered mentally, is also employed in the offering of flowers to the deity being worshipped and in invoking him or her. The letters of the mantra appropriate to a deity are also sometimes inscribed on the yantra. Pūjā is performed to the yantra, with all the usual rites, in the same way as is done to idols. The reason : the very life or spirit that dwells in the idol also dwells in its yantra form. As a matter of fact, the yantra stands not only for a deity but also for his/her place of residence, for his/her retinue and so on.

Ambā has many aspects and each aspect has a particular yantra. But we see that Mīnākṣī, Durgā, Bhuvaneśvarī and Śāradāmbā are worshipped with the Śrīcakra [not with the yantra meant for each of them individually]. This is the case not only with pūjā conducted in homes but also in temples. There is a famous temple to Durgā in the ambulatory round the hill (giripradakṣiṇa) of Tiruvaṇṇāmalai. The yantra in it is the Śrīcakra. In the Śāradāmbā temple in Śṛṅgēri also pūjā is to the Śrīcakra.

The importance of yantras in the worship of Ambā is greater than in the worship of any other deity. And among the yantras pertaining to the many aspects of Ambā the Śrīcakra has a unique place.

Lines, and the circles, squares and triangles formed by the lines, all these are part of a cakra. A yantra has a central Bindu or dot. Designs or diagrams like this have the capacity to grasp the power of various deities and it is an immeasurable power. They are indeed divine designs. They repulse evil powers, attract divine ones.

In the middle portion of the Śrīcakra, in the cakra that is a circle, there are nine triangles and these cross one another forming 43 triangles in all. The central Bindu or dot is also regarded as a triangle and it is customary to speak of 44 triangles in all. The 44 triangles have the form of six āvaraṇas. The literal meaning of "āvaraṇa" is concealing (covering, obscuring). Here the word must be construed as a circle or as a row. If a number of people stand surrounding an individual will he not be hidden? "Āvaraṇa" is to be understood in the same sense. The central Bindu or dot, which we said was called a triangle, is also regarded as an āvaraṇa. The 43 triangles surrounding it constitute five āvaraṇas. With the Bindu (and the five āvaraṇas made by the 43 triangles) there are six āvaraṇas. Many of you must be familiar with the term "navāvaraṇa". Now Muttusvāmī Dīkṣitar's[g] navāvaraṇa compositions have become very popular and the word "navāvaraṇa" is widely used especially since the compositions are broadcast by radio. Navāvaraṇa denotes the nine circles in the Śrīcakra. There are śāstras dealing with who resides in each āvaraṇa, what truths each āvaraṇa conveys, who the presiding deities are of these āvaraṇas, what blessings they give and what mudrā



Śrīcakra

belongs to each āvaraṇa. Dīkṣitar has dealt with the subject briefly in his navāvaraṇa compositions. I spoke about the six āvaraṇas: the 44 triangles are contained in them. Outside these six are three more āvaraṇas; so, altogether, there are nine ---- navāvaraṇas. Of the last three āvaraṇas two are circles with lotus petals. The eight āvaraṇas have an outer wall, so to speak, consisting of three compound walls. They are represented by three lines and they are not circles but squares. Altogether it is a design that has immeasurable divine power.....

But great caution is called for with regard to this diagram. Every line and every triangle in the yantra must be precise in measurement. Just as a change in the sound of a mantra brings evil consequences, so too even a small error in the design of a yantra can lead to unhappy consequences. Even if the design is right, if the Śrīyantra's central triangle points upwards instead of downwards, the result will be different from what we expect.

There is another aspect of Śrīcakra worship that requires much caution. When we perform pūjā with a yantra installed we must pay greater regard to ritual purity than when we do pūjā with idols. Also we must strictly adhere to what is laid down in the śāstras with regard to yantra worship.

At present in many homes people conduct certain rites in the name of Śrīcakra-pūjā. They do so to satisfy their vanity or for the sake of fashion. Some of them may be ignorant about how the pūjā is to be conducted. However it be, the rules are not properly observed and the results are unhappy; famine, lack of peace, etc.

It is not enough to have the desire to perform a rite or a pūjā. For the real fruits to be reaped you must perform it according to the injunctions of the śāstras, according to how our great men, our elders, have performed it. Much is said about the greatness of the Śrīcakra in the śāstras. And the same texts mention how the pūjā is to be conducted. And if we ignore them, telling ourselves, "I will do the pūjā as I like, according to my convenience," the desired benefits will not be yielded and the consequences may be contrary to what is expected.

A yantra is not only the place of residence of a deity; it is also a pratinidhi or a representative of the same. Even this is not correct, to say that a yantra is a representative of a deity. It is no "prati", not a "copy", but the deity in reality in the form in which the yantra is designed.

When Ambā is the deity of Śrīvidyā there is something special about her presence in her yantra form. That is why the Śrīyantra has a unique importance. In worshipping Ambā, her yantra form is regarded as being higher than even her supremely beautiful personal form[2].

I spoke of Ambā having two places of residence, one in the ocean of ambrosia, the other on the Meru mountain. The Śrīcakra must be added to these as her third place of residence.

There are two mistakes in what I have just said. First, the Śrīcakra is not merely Ambā's place of residence; it is Ambā herself: the place of residence plus the one who resides in it. The second mistake is that the yantra is not a place of residence like the ocean of ambrosia or the Meru mountain. Whether it is the ocean of ambrosia or the Meru mountain it has the yantra also with the Cintāmaṇi palace housing it. The yantra worshipped in our homes is no more than a span in size. But the ones in the ocean of ambrosia and the Meru mountain are a thousand or ten thousand times bigger and each has nine āvaraṇas. In these nine there are many deities, Ambā's entourage, and attendants. On the Bindu, the ninth āvaraṇa, Ambā is seated on the Pañcabrahmāsana.

When Ambā resides on the Meru peak, each of the āvaraṇas rise above that peak forming peaks themselves. So the Śrīcakra is made not only as a two-dimensional yantra but with the third dimension representing height; it is built tier upon tier, in a conical form. The three-dimensional Śrīcakra is called "Meru-prastāra" or simply "Meru". The two-dimensional yantra, level to the earth, is known as "Bhū-prastāra". One combining both features --- the initial āvaraṇas rising and the subsequent ones level to the earth --- is called "Ardha-meru". If all āvaraṇas are Meru-prastāra, the yantra is called "Purṇa-meru". The cakra in Kāñcī Kāmakoṣṭha is Bhū-prastāra. The one in our Maṭha is Pūrṇa-meru. In Māṅgāḍ [near Cennai] it is Ardha-meru. In the sanctum of Mūkāmbā in Tiruviḍaimarudūr [in Tañjāvūr district] it is Pūrṇa-meru.

Notes

[1] Pañcāyatana pūjā is the worship of five deities, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Ambā, Sūrya, Gaṇapati. Sometimes a sixth deity, Subrahmaṇya, is added in the form of a small spear.

[2] We attach importance to the "nāma" and "rūpa" (name and form) of a deity. But in the case of the Mother Goddess, "nāma" does not have much importance. In the Śrīvidyā mantras there is a total absence of nāma; there are only "bījākṣaras" (seed letters, seed syllables) to denote the goddess. Though the Śrīvidyā deity is the personification of beauty as Tripurasundarī, we see that her yantra is more commor in her worship than her icon. When the Mahāsvāmī was asked about this, why in the worship of Ambā, the Mother, nāma and rūpa are not given importance, he did not give any explanation but only expressed his sense of wonder about the same.

Chapter 51

Yantra, Tantra, Capital City

Each without a Separate Name

Devotees of Ambā take pride in the fact that, while the yantras of other deities are named after them (after the deities) or after their distinguishing marks — Śivacakra, Medha-Dakṣiṇāmūrti-yantra, Ṣaḍākṣara cakra and so on — the yantra of Lalitā-Tripurasundarī alone has no special name or attributes. It is simply called "Śrīcakra", the prefix "Śrī" denoting that it is very sacred and worthy of worship and very auspicious. In fact the word "cakra" itself means the Śrīcakra, suggesting that Ambā's yantra does not need to have a special name of its own.

Similar is the case with the mārga or way of Ambā's worship. It is called Śrīvidyā, suggesting that the word "mārga" itself means the mārga of her worship. The "Śrī" in Śrīvidyā also means worthy of worship and does not denote Lakṣmī, that is Śrīdevī. All ways of worship come under the general term "vidyā" or "tantra". When we speak of other deities we call the way they are worshipped after them, after their names, or after the seers who formulated that way of worship. But the vidyā of Tripurasundarī does not have a name of its own: it is merely "Śrīvidyā".

There are many different kinds of Śrīvidyā mantras. How can we then use the term Śrīvidyā mantra for all of them? So these different Śrīvidyā mantras are each called after its initial letter or after the seer who originated it. But the common name for all Lalitā tantras is Śrīvidyā.

It is not Tripurasūndarī tantra and yantra alone that have no special names, Ambā's capital city also has no special name. It is merely called "Śrīpura" or "Śrīnagara". "Pura" or "nagara" means a place, any town or city. "Śrīpura", "Śrīnagara": these names are enough to proclaim that they denote the capital city of the World Mother.

Ambā bestows on us "nityaśrī", imperishable beatitude, the wealth unsurpassed of the bliss of the Ātman. That is why her very first name in the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam* is "Śrīmātā". In keeping with this, everything connected with her has similar names, "Śrīvidyā", "Śrīcakra", "Śrīpura".

I was speaking about the Śrīyantra called Śrīcakra occurring in the *Saundaryalaharī* stanza. I mentioned that six of the nine triangles cut one another forming 44 triangles. Of the nine, four are called Śiva cakras and five Śakti cakras. The central triangle surrounding the Bindu is one of the Śakti cakras. While we do pūjā at home it must face the one who performs the pūja.

The non-dualistic union of Śiva and Śakti is shown by the criss-crossing cakras of the two. The triangles thus formed, the lotus petals in the outer circles, the circles and squares : their measurements are given in the hymn [Stanza 11, see previous chapter].

The subject should not be of mere academic interest to you. Learning it should not be like reading a novel. It must be taught by a guru and preserved as a secret. I touched upon it briefly since I thought it should not be altogether omitted.

Chapter 52

The Incomparable Beauty of Ambā

After describing the yantra, the Ācārya felt the urge to portray the beauty of Ambā, the glory of her physical form. "Is it not *Saundaryalaharī* that I am composing?" he must have asked himself and he must have felt the urge to depict the supreme beauty of Ambā's physical form. So he commences the next stanza (12) with the words, "Tvadīyam saundaryaṁ," meaning "your loveliness". "I have sung the greatness of your yantra," he seems to say addressing Ambā, "its angles, its circles, its petals, squares, in fact every detail of it. But is it so easy to sing the beauty of your form? Is it possible at all? No poet so far has been able to describe it truthfully."

Brahmā is the primordial poet. "Ādi kavaye," these words occur in the very first stanza of the *Bhāgavatam* in referring to him. If Sarasvatī herself is his Śakti, can there be a greater poet than he? We know from the Purāṇas that he has composed hymns to all deities. During times of distress the celestials go to him for help. At once he takes them to Śiva, Viṣṇu, Ambā or any other deity as the case may be and requests him or her to free them from their troubles. At the time he would sing the praises of the deity whose intervention he seeks, in the company of the celestials. When he himself is in trouble does he not have to do so? In this manner he has sung the praises of Ambā also. You see in the *Durga-Saptaśatī* that, when the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha were intent on tormenting him, he extols her. But even he is not able to paint a true picture of her beauty.

Tvadīyaṁ saundaryaṁ Tuhinagirikanye tulayitum
Kavīndrāḥ kalpante kathamapi Viriñci-prabhṛtayaḥ

"Viriñci-prabhṛtayaḥ" means "Brahmā and others". Brahmā and others try to describe Ambā's beauty. "Tulayitum" means to weigh something in the scales. "Tula" is a balance. How do we find out the weight of an object? By placing the object to be weighed on one pan of the balance and the weight on the other. We cannot determine the weight of anything directly. We have to weigh it against another object whose weight is known to us. Brahmā and others are unable in this manner to find out how great Ambā's beauty is. They seek a weighing stone known to them, an object with which Ambā's beauty can be compared, an upamāna. The face like the moon, the eyes like lotuses, the hair like a swarm of bees : it is like weighing an object against a known weight. The poets, Brahmā and others, are unable to find such weights, such objects with which Ambā's beauty can be compared. The Ācārya does not say this in so many words. He says, "kathamapi kalpante": the poets try to imagine Ambā's beauty somehow. Brahmā and other poets rack their brains to find something to which it can be likened. But they fail. Ambā's beauty is incomparable. The Ācārya does not say all this in so many words. He merely says, "kathamapi kalpante". This is the beauty of poetry: conveying a meaning by not expressly stating it. It is "dhvani"[1] [literally "sound" but in rhetoric it means "suggestion" or "hint"]. "It is true that I rushed to see the pradoṣa dīpārādhana [the worship with lamps at dusk]. " It is not necessary to add anything to these words to convey the meaning that "I could not see it". Leaving something unsaid, by merely hinting at it, makes a deep impression on the mind.

"I spoke about the yantra, its design. I want to speak about Ambā's beauty but I find that it is beyond description. If I try to give an idea of it by weighing it against objects of comparison I remember that even Brahmā and others have failed in this". By saying this the Ācārya tells us how Ambā's beauty has no match, that there is nothing to equal it, that it is so sublime.

Leave alone the question of whether a poet can describe Ambā's beauty. He, the poet or poet-devotee, must himself see that beauty and must be fully aware of it. If you ask whether anyone has seen it (Ambā's beauty) the answer is "No". If a poet has not seen Ambā and her beauty how can he describe it to others?

Why is it that no one has seen Ambā's physical form? Not quite : we cannot say that no one has had even a glimpse of her. In fact many devotee-poets have had her *darshan*. But she does not reveal herself fully: she shows herself only for a brief moment like a flash of lightning. Even those who have wholly dedicated themselves to her have not seen her fully. They see her sidelong glance, the parting of her lips in a gentle smile; in this way their eyes will retain the image of some part of her body and never do they have *darshan* of her from head to foot.

Ambā shows the beauty of her entire person only to one: her husband Parameśvara. She has assumed her supremely lovely form of Tripurasundarī only because he must unite with her and become engaged in the sport of the world. She is a great pativratā[g] and she has dedicated her body entirely to her husband. To others she may afford a glimpse of herself but will not reveal to them all her beauty. To her devotees she will show her compassion wholly. But when it comes to her beauty she has it as an asset belonging to her Svāmī, her Lord.

Does it mean then that the portrait of Ambā painted by the Ācarya in the latter section of the hymn does not represent her beauty fully? It may be so. A mother shows her child all her love but she may not reveal to it her beauty. If she adorns herself it is to please her husband, not her child. "Alankāra" means beautifying oneself. Ambā has no need to beautify herself, make herself beautiful with adornments. She is naturally beautiful. She reveals her loveliness only to her husband. That being so how can others describe her as she is? First of all, they do not know the richness of her beauty that is complete in every respect. Nor can they describe her, extol her beauty even to the extent they know it because they cannot find the words for it. Such is the splendour of her beauty. Also they cannot give an idea of it by resorting to comparisons because there is nothing in the world to compare with it.

The poet has indicated skilfully that Ambā reveals her beauty fully to Parameśvara alone. How?

Yadālokaūtsukyādamaralalana yānti manasā
Tapobhirduṣprāpāmapi Giriśasāyujya-padavīm

"Amaralalanā" means celestial damsels: Raṁbhā, Urvaśī, Menakā, Tilottamā and so on. It is such celestial damsels that we speak of as great beauties. But even they admit to themselves, after catching a mere glimpse of Ambā's beauty: "What is our beauty before hers? What we see is only a tiny fraction of her beauty. What would be her beauty like if it were revealed in full?" The celestial damsels are eager to see Ambā's beauty revealed fully in all its splendour. Suppose a musician comes across another musician who sings better than he. Would he not be keen to find out in what respect his music is better? It is the same in all fields. The celestial damsels long to know Tripurasundarī's beauty fully. "Yadālokautsukyāt" = because of the keen desire to see that beauty. The "yat" in the phrase refers to the first words in the stanza "tvadīyam saundaryam".

What do they do, the heavenly maidens who are so desirous of seeing the beauty of Ambā fully? "What is the use of our longing?" they tell themselves. "Since she (Tripurasundarī) has offered her body to her husband, it is his possession; so he alone can behold its beauty, the richness of that beauty. So what we must do is to become one with Īśvara, attain Śiva-sāyujya (union with Śiva). Then we too will be able to see Ambā's loveliness fully."

Devotees as well as jñānins have prayed for Śiva-sāyujya (union with Śiva), the former out of their devotion and the latter wanting to become Śivam in their intensity of jñāna. They have made great efforts for the same. For them Śiva-sāyujyam is an end in itself. But for the celestial damsels it is not so. For them it is a means to behold Ambā's beauty: that is the goal before them becoming one with Śiva.

But do Raṁbhā and Menakā obtain oneness with Śiva by merely longing for the same? Is it (Śiva-sāyujyam) obtained easily? "Tapobhirduṣprāpāmapi," says the Ācārya. It is not obtained by the most difficult ascetic endeavour. Celestial damsels are known to disturb those engaged in austerities. Can they control their senses, eradicate all their sensual urges? What do they do then?

We may imagine ourselves to be anything or anybody. We can build castles in the air. Thus Raṁbhā, Menakā and others imagine themselves to be Paramaśiva. "Yānti manasā Giriśasāyujya padavīm" : they attain the state of union with Śiva mentally.

In truth it is not a state that can be reached mentally. "Yam manasā na manute"[2] -- that which cannot be conceived of mentally. So if it is said that they (the celestial damsels) achieve union with Śiva mentally it means, "in spite of intending to achieve such union they remain without succeeding in it". That is they are unable to know Ambā's beauty completely.

In the first half of the stanza it is said that Brahmā and other poets try to find a suitable comparison for Ambā's beauty and that they visualise many likenesses. The inner meaning of this is that they fail to find a true comparison. In the latter half of the stanza Raṁbhā and Menakā are said to try to obtain union with Śiva, a state that is not reached even by performing severe austerities. Does it not also mean that they do not succeed? The Ācārya, in his kindness, does not have the heart to say that "Viriñci-prabhṛtayaḥ" (Brahmā and others) and "amaralalana" (the celestial damsels) fail in their efforts. This stanza in the "Ānandalaharī" section of the *Saundaryalaharī* raises Ambā's beauty (saundarya) to great heights.

References

[1] "Kāvyasyātmā dhvaniḥ."
— Ānandavardhana

[2] "Yanmanasā na manute yenāhurmano matam
Tadeva Brahma tvam viddhi nedam yadidamupāsate
— *Kenopaniṣad*, 1.6

Chapter 53

Embodiment of Time

In one stanza (14) Ambā is depicted as the embodiment of Time. "Kṣitau ṣatpañcāśad-dvisamadhika-pañcāśadudake." There are six seasons in a year and 360 days in all[1]. These 360 days are the 360 rays emanating from the light of the Kuṇḍalinī power, so it is mentioned in this stanza. Also each cakra stands for a ṛtu or season and it has as many rays as the number of days constituting the season. "Kṣitau ṣaṭpañcāśat": in the cakra representing the earth, that is in mūlādhāra, there are 56 rays. Which means Ambā is in this cakra as the 56-day-long season of spring. Thus the number of days for each cakra and the season corresponding to it are mentioned in this stanza.

As Ambā compresses herself into Time as the different seasons she remains the personification of Time. But in truth she is beyond Time. In the state in which she is beyond Time she resides in the sahasradala padma (the lotus of one thousand petals), higher than the six cakras, and her lotus feet shine as the feet of the Guru. The Ācārya mentions this: "Mayūkhāsteṣāmapyupari tava pādāṁbujayugam." "Mayūkha" means a ray, day in the form of a ray. Ambā is above the 360 days : "Teṣām api upari", that is in the sahasrāra lotus. "Tava pādāṁbuja yugam" = "your two lotus feet".

Note

[1] Perhaps the reference is to the lunar year.

Chapter 54

Bestowing the Gift of Eloquence

Importance of Sound in the Śākta System

In the "Ānandalaharī" section of the hymn there are some stanzas which speak of Ambā bestowing her grace not in her aspect of Lalitā but in the aspects of other goddesses who are connected with the Śrīvidyā tantra. I will deal with one such stanza (15).

Śarajjyotsnā-śuddhām śaśiyuta-jaṭājūṭa-makuṭāṁ
Vara-trāsa-trāṇa-sphaṭikaghuṭikā-pustaka-karāṁ
Sakṛnna tvā natvā kathamiva satām sannidadhate
Madhu-kṣīra-drākṣā-madhurimadhurīṇāh phaṇitayaḥ

Ambā is conceived of here as a form of Vāgdevī without the vīṇa. Vāgdevī means Sarasvatī.

Many do not seem to know that just as Ambā is the sister of Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī is the sister of Brahmā and Sarasvatī the sister of Paramaśiva. Brother and sister must resemble each other, must share the same outlook and perform similar functions. Like Paramaśiva, Sarasvatī is white-complexioned. "Śarajjyotsnā-śuddhām": radiant like the autumnal moon and white in colour. It is during autumn that we perform pūjā to Sarasvatī. She is in fact named "Śāradā" after the season of śarat or autumn.

The Ācārya is specially fond of the name of Śāradā. Sarasvatī is important to him, he who scaled the heights of learning and composed commentaries, hymns, and held disputations with the learned. Among the many names of Sarasvatī he is specially attached to that of Śāradā. It may be because of the purity suggested by the name, by the whiteness and the pleasant coolness that it invokes. "Śa" and "Sa" are often interchanged. Thus Śāradā becomes Sāradā. In the North there is the practice of Śāradā being called Sāradā. "Sāra-dā" means one who grants a blessing that has much substance, or much meaning. Jñāna indeed is sāra-tattva. This may be another reason for the Ācārya liking the name of Śāradā. In Śṛṅgeri Ambā is installed in the form of Śāradā. The Pīṭha of Śṛṅgeri is also named after Śāradā, Śāradā Pīṭha. The maṭha in Dvāraka is called Śārada Pīṭha. Our Maṭha (Kāñcī) too is known by that name — Kāmakoṭi Pīṭha, Śāradā Maṭha. Even though the Ācārya is specially fond of the name of Śāradā it does not occur anywhere in the hymn and likewise names such as Lalitāmbā and Tripurasundarī are also not seen used. But by the very first word of the stanza (15), "Śarajjyotsnā", he reminds us of Śāradā.

The goddess in her form here is pure white like Īśvara. Like him she wears a crown of matted hair. Besides, she has in it, as is the case with him, the crescent-moon. Herself white like moonlight, she becomes further radiant with the crescent-moon in her matted hair : "Śaśiyuta-jaṭājūṭa-makuṭām".

She has four hands. Two of them show the vara and abhaya gestures, "varatrāsatrāṇa". Instead of "abhaya", the term used here is "trāsatrāṇa" alliteratively. "Trāsa" is fear and "trāṇa" protecting: protecting one from fear is abhaya.

The Ācārya had said earlier: "But for you all deities have the abhaya and vara gestures". That is why in depicting a form other than Lalitāmbā, that is a deity connected with Sarasvatī, he shows her with the hand gestures of conferring boons and granting freedom from fear (varābhaya hastas) and not with the vīṇā and the parrot in her hands.

Then the Ācārya mentions the akṣamālā or rosary and the book which are distinctive to Sarasvatī. There must be an amendment to this, "distinctive to Sarasvatī". Sarasvatī's brother, in his aspect of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, also bears the two (rosary and book) in his hands. "Sphaṭika-ghuṭikā-pustaka-karām". "Sphaṭika-ghuṭikā" means akṣamālā: akṣamālā is indeed "akṣaramālā" (a string of letters). From "a" to "kṣa" there are 51 letters and for each letter there is a bead, all the letters (that is all the beads) together making an akṣamālā.

I must speak here about a subject of the utmost importance to the Śākta system; indeed it is its life-blood. I am referring to the importance given to letters in it or to sound which is the basis of all letters. We have seen that creation is caused by vibrations. The vibrations exist in space in the subtle form of sounds and from them originate creation, mantras and the Vedas that are replete with mantras. I said that sound is the tanmātra which is the subtle power of space. The sport of creation and creation becoming absorbed in the Root (all that is created returning to its original source): these processes represent evolution and involution and constitute the backbone of the Śākta system. So the concept of sound which runs through it may be called its life-blood (or its vital breath). On the one hand, there is in the Śākta system the cosmos of artha or the cosmos of vastu and in it is mentioned the five principles of Śiva, Śakti, Sadāśiva, Īśvara and Śuddha Vidyā — from the Parabrahman down to the creation of the gross material world. On the other hand, there is the cosmos of sound which has five categories beginning with "parā". After parā we have "paśyanti" and "madhyamā". The parā sound can neither be vocalised by man nor is it audible to him. This extremely subtle sound in its slightly gross form is "paśyanti". Parā is sound that is absolute; it is sound in the fundamental sense. When that utterly subtle sound becomes a little gross it is called "paśyanti". "Paśyanti" means "sees", "views". In Tamiḷ it is referred to as *"paiśanti"*. Subsequent to this is the sound produced by itself, without human effort, and it is called "madhyamā". It is in between the subtle sound and the sound produced vocally by man : that is why (in the intermediate stage) it is called "madhyamā"; sound that occurs on its own is known as "anāhata śabda". It means "unstruck sound". "Āhata" = struck; "anāhata" = unstruck.

The question arises: "Is the sound produced by our speech the result of striking an object?" Yes, it is. The sound we produce when we speak, the sound produced by musical instruments, all sound that we hear with our ears are produced by striking (some object or other). The sounds of our speech and our songs are created by air striking our throat in different ways and the tongue striking the teeth and palate. The harmonium, the violin, the flute, the nāgasvaram, all these instruments produce their sound as air strikes them. When you play the flute, you close its holes with your fingers and then release them : this also can be said to be striking. Plucking the strings of the vīṇā is equivalent to striking them. All this is like administering a loving stroke. Bowing the violin is also a kind of striking, striking its strings. As for the mṛdaṅgaṁ, ghaṭaṁ, *kanjira* and so on, they are really struck or beaten hard to produce their sounds. Some percussion instruments need to be struck or beaten with sticks. The instrument called the *jālra* (castanets) has two halves: to play it you strike one half with the other. All this belongs to the āhata category. Anāhata sound arises by itself, unstruck: it is madhyamā. "Vaikharī" comes after parā, paśyanti and madhyamā. It is sound in the gross form that is produced by us with our mouth (vocal cords) and it involves some effort on our part. In this fourth category of sound there are two types: "dhvani" which is mere (or inarticulate) sound and sound that is articulate and called "varṇa". This is the fifth category of sound. Varṇa means letter. There are 51 letters that constitute articulate speech.

A child produces all sorts of inarticulate sounds. It is babble and it is not made up of distinct syllables like *ka, ṅa, ca, ña* and so on. These mere sounds come under the category of dhvani. Even grown-ups produce mere dhvani when they cry or laugh.

From parā to the two types of vaikharī sound there are five tattvas of sound. These are equivalent to the five tattvas in the cosmos of matter. It can be said that the five sound tattvas are more important than the five concepts of the artha-prapañca, since all objects of the material cosmos are created by the vibrations of sound.

What do we call the gross objects of the gross world? "Padārthas". We often hear ordinary folks without much learning speaking thus: "I went shopping and bought many padārthas." We note from this that gross objects come under the category of "padārthas". "Padārtha" literally denotes what is meant by speech, by words. Pada, speech, word, belongs to the śabda-prapañca, the verbal cosmos, the world of sound. What emerges in the gross form from it is "artha". What is called "artha-prapañca" is the artha or meaning inhering in speech or sound.

Among the various wonders performed by Ambā with her Māyā: in the Kuṇḍalinī cakras Ambā in her different forms of sound resides in an order that is the reverse of how she resides in them as the five elements. In the base cakra called mūlādhāra she is in the extremely gross form of earth. Then as she rises she becomes more and more subtle, assuming the forms of water, fire, wind; and in the viśuddhi cakra, that is in the pit of the bosom, as ākāśa or space. But in the śabda-prapañca, her ascent in the cakras is from the subtle to the gross: she is the parā of space in the mūlādhārā, and in the pit of the bosom she is the gross vaikharī.

The gross sound outwardly manifested as speech is not to be regarded as belonging to any inferior category. The 51 letters representing articulate speech are called mātṛkās. "Mātṛkā" means mother. When she is a lady of great prestige, when Ambā is a queen, she is Mother. But when she mixes with us in affection, as one among us, she is mātṛkā, the little mother.

The supreme queen—Mahārājñī -- as the personification of the 51 varṇas is called "Mātṛkāvarṇasvarūpiṇī" in the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam*. The word "Sarvavarṇātmike" occurs in Kālidāsa's *Śyāmaḷādaṇḍakam*.

The śabda-prapañca is of great importance to the Śākta tantra. The akṣamālā (rosary) and book are symbols of it. The former consists of 51 beads representing the same number of mātṛkās.

The Śrīvidyā mantras are not in the form of the names of Ambā; they are what are called "bījākṣaras", pure letters or syllables ("seed letters"). It means the Supreme Goddess takes the form of such sounds. If these bījākṣaras are constantly muttered with one-pointed devotion Ambā will appear in the form of sound and give her blessings. And these blessings will indeed be great. The muttering of these seed letters is capable of giving the devotee the same blessings as the practice of Kuṇḍalinī yoga and he will be helped to come face to face with Ambā. That apart, Ambā will grant us all our prayers, all that we desire, if we keep muttering these mantras or bījākṣaras, basic letters, which are her form as sound. We will even be able to have *darshan* of her physical form: we will be able to behold her form from the hair on her head to her feet (keśādi-pādāntam). Thus her sport is such that it will accomplish for us all that we need here and hereafter.

So far we have been speaking about letters alone. What we speak, what we write, all that is made up of letters : poetry, hymns, śāstras, everything beginning with the Vedas.

There are three divisions called "kūṭas" in Śrīvidyā mantras. The first of the three is called vāgbhava, originating from "vāk". A mantra in its entirety is Ambā herself. Of it the face is "vāgbhava kūṭa": after all one speaks with the mouth which is part of the face. It is given immense importance, and it is said again and again in the Śākta texts that Ambā will bless her devotees with special powers of expression, make them poets. This is mentioned repeatedly in the *Saundaryalaharī* itself. Why are vāgbhava-kūṭa mantras so important?

Parāśakti has blessed the human race with the power of speech and no other species has it. The fact that it is a special gift to us shows its importance. If we have right knowledge we will realise that the purpose of this gift is to take us to the most exalted state (śreyas) and we will use it (the gift of speech) to serve that purpose. Our ultimate goal must be to attain her by using speech for a divine purpose [for matters connected with her].

Where does lie the greatness of speech? It is not enough for a man to have experience of a sublime nature: he must raise himself and enable others too to have the same experience. It is through speech that this great service is accomplished. Why does Ambā bestow on an individual the power of speech and the genius of poesy? *"Śera vārum, śekattire"*[1] : thus one child of hers must call all other children; it must call again and again all other children to share its divine experience with them, share its divine visions of beauty and also share its noble thoughts. What more meritorious act can there be than this? That is why speech is extolled again and again as a special gift.

When a guru lays down a way of sādhana for a discipline meant to achieve a high goal, he imposes certain harsh restrictions. The poet makes the goal of that sādhana attainable to all, and attainable easily, happily and delightfully, through his poems, through his songs. So the benefits of Ambā's blessings conferred on one individual are not monopolised by him but become the property of all as in a socialist order. This is what Ambā does with the gift of speech. That is why it is extolled again and again.

What Lalitāmbikā accomplishes herself is mentioned in this verse as something done by her special form called Vāgdevī.

Good people, virtuous people, have to prostrate themselves only once before Vāgdevī who has hands held in the gestures of granting boons and freedom from fear and also hands that bear the rosary and the book. "Satām" means for "good people". "Sakṛnnatvā": "sakṛt" in this phrase means "once"; "natvā" means "by prostrating themselves". It is enough for them, good people, to prostrate themselves once before the goddess. Who need to prostrate themselves only once? The question is important. It is not mentioned here that "anybody" by prostrating himself before the goddess will receive the gift of poesy. Noble people, people of exemplary conduct, they alone need to prostrate themselves before her only once. "Madhu-kṣīra-drākṣā-madhurima-dhuriṇāḥ phaṇitayaḥ": the words apply to them. The Ācārya mentions three things noted for their sweetness: honey, milk, grapes. They are not only sweet, they can be taken in easily and are digested easily. Also, they are extremely nourishing. There is nothing to equal them in these respects. It is to these that the Ācārya likens the words of the wise taken in by a man, words that become inwardly digested and strengthen him in his ultimate quest. By prostrating themselves only once before her, Vāgdevī bestows on them the poetic genius of raining words that are as sweet as honey, milk and grapes.

Instead of stating that virtuous people will be blessed with such powers of speech, instead of stating it as a fact, the Ācārya asks with the art of a poet: "How will it not create such powers of speech?" : "Kathamiva na sannidadhate?"

In this stanza the Ācārya indulges in word play. He uses "natvā" twice in the phrase "sakṛnnatvā natvā". Such use of words belongs to the figure of speech called "śabdālankāra". The second "natvā" means "prostrating" (themselves). This is a word by itself. "Sakṛnnatvā" is split thus: "sakṛt", "na" and "tvā": here "na" + "tva" = "natva". "Na" indicates a negative sense. When the Ācārya asks, "Will there not be the power of speech?", he adds "na" to "sannidadhate" to get that meaning. In ordinary speech it must be "na sannidadhate". But here the Ācārya uses the "na" earlier in "sakranna". He thus indulges in verbal play.

Kavīndrāṇām cetaḥ-kamalavanabālātaparuciṁ
Bhajante ye santaḥ katicidaruṇāmeva bhavatīṁ
Viriñcipreyasyāstaruṇatara-śṛṅgāralaharī-
Gabhīrābhir vāgbhir vidadhati satām rañjanamamī

After mentioning Vāgdevī who is white-complexioned and sāttvik[g] in nature, the Ācārya speaks in this stanza (16) of the goddess in her rājasik aspect in which she is a deep red in colour. Before sunrise the eastern sky is red and we call it "aruṇodaya", the rise of Aruṇa, "aruṇa" meaning red. The charioteer of the Sun God is red-complexioned and he is called Aruṇa. It is he who is seen first since he sits in front of the chariot and his appearance means aruṇodaya. Then we see the Sun God who is seated in the centre of the chariot and his appearance is called sūryodaya. Here the Ācārya speaks about another form of Sarasvatī who is red in colour. Those who meditate on this Sarasvatī are blessed with the gift of erotic poetry. Śṛṅgāra, love or the erotic rasa, is associated with rajoguṇa[g]. Since it is customarily represented by red it is appropriate that Aruṇāmbā (the red Sarasvatī) should give her devotees such a blessing.

But love or śṛṅgāra in this context is not to be understood in its common or vulgar form but in the sense in which the husband-and-wife relationship of Kāmeśvara and Kāmeśvarī is understood, the inner meaning of the same. Those who can appreciate the true meaning behind it and take delight in it are men of good nature. In the previous stanza it was said that by making obeisance only once to the white-complexioned Sarasvatī such men acquired the gift of poesy. The poetry they compose, the songs they sing, must also be "white", that is they must be sāttvik, and teach people passionless detachment and jñāna. There is a state of spiritual perfection in which one takes delight in jñāna and detachment in an erotic manner. This is possible for sādhus, virtuous and mature people. So devotees of the red Sarasvatī sing in such a manner as to delight them. In the previous stanza the Ācārya spoke that sādhus would obtain the gift for words sweet like honey, milk and grapes. In this stanza he says that devotion to the red Sarasvatī creates joy for the same sādhus through their devotional poems. The poets referred to in the previous stanza are in this stanza rasikas, connoisseurs.

But who are the poets here? They are sādhu-śreṣṭhas, the best among sādhus, those who have gone to levels higher than other sādhus. Those who receive the gift of poesy from the white Sarasvatī are sādhus in general. Among them who are the ones who compose poetry with the sentiment of love? "Katicid santāḥ", a few (sādhus), some. This means that even among sādhus only a few must have reached the state of "nāyikā bhāva", those who look upon themselves as the brides of the deity. Only a few utterly mature sādhus can compose poetry permeāted with the mood of love containing truths that lead you to the Ultimate. And only the rest of the sādhus can listen to it and appreciate it in the right spirit and take delight in it. The Ācārya uses the word "rañjanam" to denote the delight taken by sādhus in such poetry. There is a pun in the word. The syallable "ra" denotes red. Agni (fire) is red: hence the word "kāmāgni", the "fire of love" or "desire" is "ra". "Ram" + "janam" = that which creates red. It is the state of mellowness, a redness akin to that of embers. A fully ripe fruit will be red, is it not? *"Śemmai śeyvatu"* (in Tamiḷ) : the meaning is to make something whole and mature. The delight caused by mental redness (mellowness) is "rañjanam". Poets who are utterly mature compose poems through the grace of the red Sarasvatī, poems that cause other sādhus happiness that is mellow. If this Sarasvatī is "Aruṇā" (Red), the poets here generate "raṁ" (redness): they compose poems that create waves of the sentiment of love, a flow of the erotic mood. Such poetry the Ācārya describes as "gabhīrābhiḥ vāgbhiḥ", that is words of depth, words of profundity, words of a deep significance. Superficially seen, this poetry is a wave of śṛṅgāra but if one dives deep into it one will discover pearls and corals of wisdom.

Kāmeśvạrī herself has the name of Aruṇā. Her dhyāna-śloka[g] has this : "Aruṇām karuṇā-tarangitāksīm". According to wise men the goddess mentioned by the Ācārya here is Aruṇā Sarasvatī with eight hands: she has the four hands of Kāmeśvarī bearing the bow, arrows, noose and goad and the four hands of Sarasvatī of which two bear the rosary and the book and the other two show the gestures of granting boons and freedom from fear.

In the next stanza (17) the Ācārya speaks of the immense benefits of learning that will be obtained by meditating on Lalitā-Tripurasundarī surrounded by Vagdevatās (the deities of speech).

"Vāgdevī" in the singular denotes Sarasvatī alone. Vāgdevatās--in the plural--denote eight of them. The sixteen vowels beginning with *"a"* has one Vāgdevatā. *Ka*-varga (*ka, kha, ga, gha,* ṅ) has another Vāgdevatā. Similarly *ca*-varga (*ca, cha, ja, jha, ña*), *ta*-varga (*ta, tha, da, dha,* ṇa), *pa*-varga (*pa, pha, ba, bha, ma*), have each another. So the 51 letters have together eight Vāgdevatās. The Vāgdevatā of the vowel group is called "Viśini". The eight devatās are together called "Viśinyādi devatās". It is they, bidden by Ambā, who sing the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam*. The eight Vāgdevatās occupy the eight angles of the seventh āvaraṇa of the Śrīcakra, thus surrounding Ambā.

Since they are the mothers who give birth to words [to speech] the Ācārya begins the stanza with the words, "Savitribhiḥ vācām". There is a kind of crystal which is believed to melt with the impact of moonlight on it. It is called Candrakānta (moonstone), so it is mentioned in the books. The Vāgdevatās are like moonstone reflecting moonlight within them. In one stanza (15) the Ācārya says, "Śarajjyotsnā śuddhām", in another (16) "Aruṇāṁ". Here (17) he says that Ambā who is Aruṇā is surrounded by Vāgdevatās who are radiant like moonlight. He who meditates on Ambā the queen, "sañcintayati yaḥ", keeping in mind her companions, the Vāgdevatās, will be blessed with the gift of composing great poetic works. His words will have the rasa[8] of the flow of speech of great men. "Mahatām bhangiruci". "Ruci" means taste: in any language the word used for savouring food is also used for literary appreciation.

Why should only the taste known by the tongue be mentioned? So the Ācārya adds the smell known by the nose. Just as words taste sweet like honey, milk and grapes, what kind of fragrance do they have? The divine fragrance emanating from the face of Sarasvatī who is all the eight Vagdevatās combined. The words of a great poet will have the fragrance comparable to this, fragrance that will arouse the urge of sweet love. Thus the Ācārya has composed the stanza. "Vacobhiḥ Vāgdevī vadana kamalāmoda-madhuraiḥ". Sarasvatī is the embodiment of purity and all sāttvik qualities and she is also the fountain of all arts. When such a goddess opens her mouth the very air we breathe will be redolent of her fragrance. There is no need for her to take betels or *jinda*[2] pills. Even without wearing flowers in it, Ambā's hair will spread perfume — I will come to that subject later. Similarly, without taking cardamoms and mace, Vāgdevī's mouth will spread a pleasant smell. The words of a great poet will exude the same smell—and whoever recites his verses, his mouth too will be imparted the same pleasing smell: we may take it that the stanza conveys such a meaning. Since the fragrance naturally present in Sarasvatī's mouth is imparted to the poet's composition, the mouth of the one who recites it will also have the same pleasing smell. "*Vaḷḷāl* [the man of boundless munificence, in Tamiḷ], the more you are sung the more the mouth becomes fragrant," so sings the man who is himself called Vaḷḷalār[3].

That Ambā blesses one with the power of literary expression is stated in a number of stanzas in the "Saundaryalaharī" section. In one stanza (75) it is mentioned that her breast milk bestows the gift of boundless poesy. In another stanza (99) it is said that Ambā will enable her devotee to earn the sidelong glance of Sarasvatī (that is he will receive the blessings of Sarasvatī) and Brahmā himself will envy him his literary genius. In another verse (98) the Ācārya observes that the sacred water of Ambā's feet makes even a dumb man burst into eloquent poetry. That Ambā blesses her devotees with the gift of poesy and learning is frequently stated. The Ācārya who has seen the divine beauty of Ambā shares his experience with others through his descriptions in the hymn and finds unsurpassed bliss in doing so. He must also be deriving great satisfaction in doing good to others in this way. Why does he mention again and again that the devotee of Ambā will receive the gift of literary expression? He hopes that those who read his hymn will become her devotees, acquire the gift for words through her grace, compose hymns themselves and thus do good to others.

Notes

[1] *"Śera vārum, sekattire"* (Oh, people of the world, come together in the quest of the Supreme One.) — *Tāyumānavar*

[2] A kind of sweet-smelling pellet taken with betels.

[3] Vaḷḷalār's real name was Rāmaliṅga Svāmigaḷ, 1823-74. A Tamil mystic, he preached universal brotherhood.

Chapter 55

Curing Illness

Ambā's companions, the Vāgdevatās, are described in Stanza 17 as possessing the colour of the moonstone. The Ācārya calls the stone "śaśimaṇiśilā". In a subsequent stanza [20, reproduced below] he speaks about how Ambā herself is meditated upon as possessing the colour of that stone. The word he uses here is "himagiriśilā" instead of "śaśimaṇiśilā". "Śaśa" means a rabbit. There is a dark spot on the moon which resembles a rabbit; that is why the moon is called "śaśi". It is customary to say that ambrosia and dew trickle down from the moon. He is also called "Sudhākara" because, it is believed, he produces nectar. Since he is, besides, said to make snow he is known as "Himakara". Does not *"Himayamalai"* mean mountain of snow in Tamiḷ? By speaking of "Himakaraśilā", the Ācārya refers to the place where Ambā, Himagirisutā (daughter of the mountain of snow), resides. He also refers to the nectar or ambrosia flowing from Ambā's glance. The point to note is that, while he says that it is Ambā who creates the flow of ambrosia, he mentions, at the same time, that the devotee too by his glance does the same thing, that he creates a flow of ambrosia.

Kirantīm aṅgebhyaḥ kiraṇa-nikurumbāmṛtarasaṁ
Hṛdi tvāmādhatte himakaraśilā-murtimiva yaḥ
Sa sarpāṇām darpam śamayati śakuntādhipa iva
Jvarapḷuṣṭān dṛṣṭyā sukhayati sudhādhārasirayā

The remarkable thing about this stanza is that it deals with freedom from illness. People undergo great suffering from many types of disease. Half or three-fourths of those who come to see the likes of me pray for relief from this or that ailment. So I know how people suffer and the different kinds of diseases that afflict them. The Ācārya must have known better, don't you think so? Not only must he have known better about the ailments from which people suffered, he had the capacity to cure them also. In his compassion he desired that generations of people born after him must also be helped to find remedies for their ailments.

He thought to himself, "It cannot be said that all of them are likely to regard me as a god. Even those who will regard me as an avatāra will think of me only as an incarnation of jñāna ('jñānāvatāra'). 'We can pray to him for jñāna, for detachment. It will not be proper if we pray to him for relief from bodily afflictions', they may think in this manner."

When we see a great person face to face, in flesh and blood, we recognise his many and varied qualities. We will know him not only as a great individual and as a jñānin, but as a parent, as a healer, as one who provides employment and arranges for our marriage. We see him in manifold roles and we can receive his blessings in answer to all our prayers. But once a jñānin has shed his mortal coils we believe that we can remember him only as one who brings us enlightenment, jñāna. People pray to a "siddha", even after he is no more, for relief from bodily ills and for other gains. The idea is fixed in our minds that the Ācārya is a jñānin and nothing but a jñānin. This must be the reason why to help future generations, the Ācārya (Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda) resolved to compose hymns to various deities, by reciting which people would be freed from all their afflictions. His *Subrahmaṇya-Bhujaṅgaṁ* is one such devotional poem. In this hymn *Saundaryalaharī* also he has included verses by reciting which the sick will be freed from the diseases afflicting them.

I remember mentioning it before[1]: the *Saundaryalaharī* is entirely a mantra śāstra. Each stanza of it must be thought of as a mantra and recited or muttered repeatedly and each will bring a particular benefit, a particular blessing. There are verses with a māntrik base in the hymn which, if recited, will earn you the sidelong glance of Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī (that is bring you their grace). There are verses meant particularly to obtain proficiency in music; for the birth of a son; the return in good health of a man who has been away in a distant place and of whose whereabouts nothing is known; "para-kāya-praveśa" or entering the body of another; warding off ghosts and evil spirits; removal of the malefic effects of planets. There are also stanzas in the hymn for many other such purposes.[2] Above all, there are mantras in stanzaic form that take you so far as to be within reach of jñāna and liberation. If we read the hymn without desiring anything we will come face to face with the manifestation of Ambā either in the Saguṇa form or as Nirguṇa[g].

Whatever Ambā has made an individual inwardly, whether he is a devotee or one seeking jñāna, she will manifest herself to him in accordance with it -- as Saguṇa to the devotee and as Nirguṇa to the jñānin. Even if a man reads the hymn with the intention of earning a reward his desire will be fulfilled. As mentioned earlier each stanza will bring him a particular benefit. The first and last stanzas will fulfil all his desires; they are "sarvasiddhi-pradaṁ".

If you look at the meaning of some of the stanzas you will be able to guess the benefits arising from reciting them. I say "you will be able to guess" because in these verses the fruits yielded from reciting them are not expressly stated. So we have to infer them from the meaning of the ślokas. The stanzas which expressly state such benefits are very few indeed. We saw that in the verses dealing with the white Sarasvatī, with the red Sarasvatī and with Ambā surrounded by the Vāgdevatās the benefit yielded by reciting them, the gift of poesy, is clearly mentioned. The present śloka also ("Kirantīm aṅgebhyaḥ") speaks of the relief to be obtained by reciting it. But even here, one must note, it is merely stated that "if you worship a deity of such and such a form you will derive such and such a benefit". The verse does not say that *"If you recite this śloka* you will receive such and such a reward". It is great men who were able to divine the inner mind of the Ācārya — his direct disciples or his followers who came after him — that discovered and made known how the repeated recitation of a particular stanza would have the effect of worshipping the deity mentioned in it. They have also told us in detail what yantra is to be drawn or installed for a particular stanza, the number of days during which the stanza is to be recited, and the number of times each day. Noted by them, besides, are the fruits that will be gained by such worship[3].

As seen before, from the meaning of the verses we can guess the blessings conferred by reciting them. One stanza (66) says that Sarasvatī is overcome by shame as she hears the voice of Ambā. So sweet is it that she stops playing the vīṅā. Ambā's neck has three creases representing the three "grāmas" in music and they are boundaries meant to prevent a mix-up of ragas (Stanza 69). If these two stanzas are recited as mantras, we may take it that the reward will be proficiency in music. Even after consuming amṛta the celestials perish in the great deluge; but

Parameśvara alone does not because, though he has swallowed poison, there is the glory of Ambā's tāṭaṅka (ear-ornament) to save him, so says another verse (28). We may infer from this that by reciting this stanza we will be cured of poison and that we will be vouchsafed long life. But most of the ślokas are such that we cannot guess the benefits they will bring us. In the six cakras of the body [mūlādhāra, svādhiṣṭhāna and so on] Ambā is present as the five elements and as manas, mind (Stanza 35). It is believed that by reciting this stanza one afflicted with consumption is cured. But there is no clue in the verse itself to suggest this. There are many stanzas in the hymn like this. This is what is called "mantrārtha", that is the result or benefit yielded by the power of the sound, the sound of the mantra. The meaning of certain words [in a mantra or a poem] is one thing but the result produced by their sound is quite another, with no connection with it [with the meaning]. Sugar is powdered to make a number of objects like little boxes, dolls. We can make even things looking like chillies with it. But these chillies are sweet because the substance out of which they are made is sweet. The substance called sound, or the potency of a mantra, is one thing and the "doll made of the verse" is another.

We also see that in some cases the same śloka gives benefits that are different from one another. Take the stanza beginning with the words, "Śrutīnām mūrdhāno" (84). It is to be recited by one wanting to enter the body of another ("para-kāya-praveśa"). But it is also indicated as a means of obtaining liberation. "Is that right?" The two results produced by the verse are so different and hence the question. But the question will not arise if we realise that we must attach a value to the outlook, needs and faith of the devotee reciting the stanza. Depending upon the requirements and the desire of the devotee, the same stanza will yield different benefits. Honey induces sleep in one suffering from sleeplessness; but at the same time, it keeps a man, who is always sleepy awake and alert. Thus these mantras which are in the form of verses will bring results according to what a devotee prays for. Take, for example, the stanza (63) which is recited as a means to attain union of the individual Self with the Brahman. This śloka has it that in the sweetness, in the magic, of the gentle smile of Ambā the nectar rained by moonlight turns sour: it begins with the words, "Smitajyotsnājālam". It is mentioned that if you recite this verse even without having in mind a sublime idea [like that of becoming one with the Brahman] you will derive the benefit of attracting people to yourself. Another stanza (73) says that it was by sucking at the breast of Ambā that Gaṇapati and Subrahmaṇya are able to remain eternal brahmacārins. If seekers of jñāna recite it repeatedly they will not only be rewarded with the strength to remain brahmacārins, they will also receive the ultimate blessing of liberation. It is also said that mothers with babies in arms will have plenty of breast milk if they keep reading this śloka with devotion (mothers who find it hard otherwise to breast-feed their children).

[The Gurudeva points to the garland of limes he is wearing and says...] Take one of these limes. It has four or five uses. It is because it has the power to attract divine forces that we string a number of limes together to make a garland for Ambā. During Vyāsa pūjā we worship every one included in the lineage of our gurus. Each guru is invoked in a lime fruit. Limes have the power to transmit our good intentions to another, to remove from him the effects of evil eye, and to bring him every kind of good fortune. That is why when we go to see an important man we take with us a lime to give him. The fruit is sour to taste and yet we take it. We relish rice mixed with the juice of lime and lime pickle. While the fruit controls bile it can also be a palliative in cases of insanity. Besides, we use it to cleanse brass and silver vessels. How different are the two powers: that of attracting the divine forces and that of cleansing vessels. The same can be said about the potency of sound: it brings us the power of the divine and at the same time does us good in a very mundane sense.

"I won't ask for anything myself. I won't ask for this and that. Give me that which you yourself think is best for me. Or it would be all right even if you do not give me anything. I read this hymn for the sheer joy I find in it." The devotee who has such an attitude belongs to the highest plane. However, Ambā grants us whatever we ask her for.

Among the verses that bring a variety of benefits there are some occurring here and there in the hymn that have the power to cure certain ailments. And there are a few that have the power to cure all diseases. The one in which occur the words, "Tava vadana-saundaryalaharī" is an example. Besides there are ślokas that are recited to bring relief to people suffering from eye disease, ulcer, nervous trouble which is common these days, diabetes, rheumatism, diseases caused by sinful living, dumbness and so on. For eye and ear troubles you must recite Stanza 52. In it the Ācārya says to Ambā, "Your eyes extend up to your ears" ("Gate karṇābhyarnam... ime netre"). Even to think that Amba's eyes extend up to her ears is to get relief from eye and ear troubles. In this there is correspondence between the meaning of the verse and the meaning of the sound [what it accomplishes]. But in another verse (58) there is no such correspondence: in this, though both eyes and ears are mentioned, the benefit brought by reciting it is relief from all ailments. Along with the eyes and ears mention is made of the space between them, "pālī". This space looks like the bow of Manmatha. The meaning is: "Manmatha uses as an arrow your sidelong glance—which reaches up to your ear—to string his bow and aim it at Parameśvara and achieve victory." The sound of the śloka has the power to cure all diseases. If you ask about the connection between the meaning of the verse and what it does, there is no answer. All we can say is that its "sound value" is such.

I spoke about verses in the hymn that serve the purpose of mantras for the cure of one, no, two diseases, expelling a poison, healing a fever.

"Kirantīm aṅgebhyaḥ kiraṇa-nikurumbāmṛtarasam". One must meditate on Ambā as one from whose body ambrosia keeps flowing in the form of rays. "Himakaraśila mūrtimiva": she is the colour of moonstone. What is the colour of moonstone? How does a colourless crystal reflect moonlight? That colourless crystal is immaculate, cool, bright. One must meditate on Ambā as one moulded of moonstone and emitting nectarine rays.

Ambā is the colour of a stone that melts in the radiance of the moon, the moon that exudes snow. Through each hair of her body, through each pore, she emits a ray: to think thus itself is so pleasing and comforting to one running a temperature.

One who keeps meditating like this will acquire the nature of ambrosia. What is ambrosia the opposite of? Of poison, is it not? So one who meditates in the manner mentioned above will not be affected by snake bite and other poisons. The opposite of viṣa or poison is amṛta. Opposed to the one who possesses poison, the snake, is Garuḍa.

Notes & References

[1] This occurs in the latter part of Chapter 5, "Why the Drama Enacted by Nandikeśvara".

[2] The benefits gained by reciting particular verses from the *Saundaryalaharī:* 3, 12, 15, 16, 17, 60, 64, 75, 98, and 99--sidelong glance or blessings of Sarasvatī; 23, 45, 71, 91, 99--sidelong glance or blessings of Laksmī; 96 and 99--sidelong glance of both Sarasvatī and Laksmī; 66 and 69--proficiency in music; 6, 11, 46, 98--birth of a son; 9--for a man who has gone to a distant land to return safely; 30, 84--parakāyapraveśa (entering the body of another); 24, 37. 85, 90--to be freed from an evil spell and to be exorcised of a ghost or evil spirit; 40--to be rid of the influence of malefic planets; 27, 63, 73. 84, 97, 99--to obtain jñāna, liberation, the supreme bliss (saccidānanda).

[3] Details about this can be gathered form the Tamiḷ commentary on the *Saundaryalaharī* by Brahmaśrī Tetiyūr Subrahmaṇya Śāstrī and in the *Saundaryalaharī* edited by Brahmaśrī A. Kuppuswāmī with ten commentaries of the text.

[4] Stanzas 36, 44, 58 and 59.

[5] Ślokas and the ailment from which one will obtain relief by reciting them: 52--eye trouble; 95, 96—wounds; 41—ulcer in the stomach; 95—nervous disorders; 34—diabetes and rheumatism; 54—diseases brought on by sinful living; 60, 98 (?) —deafness.

Chapter 56

"Good Snake", "Bad Snake"

Garuḍa[1] and the peacock are regarded as the worst enemies of snakes. Mahāviṣṇu has Garuḍa for his vehicle, while Subrahmaṇya has the peacock. The irony of it is that Mahāviṣṇu reclines on the serpent and, as for Subrahmaṇya, he is called Nāgarāja[2]; indeed in a number of places there are temples to him where he is worshipped in the form of a serpent.

How would you explain such contradictions? The same snake symbolises two different things or concepts. When it is in a man's mūlādhāra, and asleep in the form of Kuṇḍalinī, it represents his sexual activity. It is then considered a bad snake, a poisonous snake, since the man's little vitality is spent in the form of sexual energy. It is this poison that Garuḍa and the peacock destroy. After the poisonous sexual activity ceases the Kuṇḍalinī snake ascends to the sahasrāra and pours out ambrosia. There it becomes a "good" snake[3], not a cobra, but a benign snake. When it is sleeping in the mūlādhāra cakra of a man it squanders his prāṇik energy as semen; but, when it is in the sahasrāra, it makes it (sahasrāra itself) ambrosia and disseminates the nectar inside. That semen is produced by kāma is well known. It is said that it becomes ambrosia through the practice of yoga. You cannot deny this without practising yoga [and finding out the truth yourself].

The role of semen in procreation is a fact that is well known. There are men whom we call yogeśvaras and yogasiddhas (lords of yoga, accomplished adepts in yoga) but we have not known them to be immortal through the flow of amṛta in them. We hear of them living up to the age of 300 or 400, but, then, they too die. So how can we believe this phenomenon of the flow of amṛta?

There is a difference between this ambrosia and the celestial ambrosia that keeps the body imperishable for very long. All that the celestial ambrosia does is to keep the body alive for long. It has nothing to do with the advancement of the Self. Devāmṛta (the celestial ambrosia), the product of the churning of the ocean of milk, is like a medicine, a medicine of a high order. It protects the body for long, that is all it can do. It has no power to protect what is within the body, "śāririka" or the Ātman. The celestials who have consumed ambrosia, have they become jñānins? As for mortals, after years of sensual enjoyment, they will become old and weak, develop disgust with such pleasures, and exclaim, "Enough, enough of all this." They will eventually develop detachment. But the celestials do not lose their health, nor do they age, so they have no way of escaping sensual enjoyment and developing detachment, passionlessness. True yogins will not be interested in yoga if all that the Kuṇḍalinī does is to create ambrosia that makes the body imperishable for long merely for petty pleasures. They practise yoga in their quest for eternal bliss. In it, in their practice of yoga, the flow of ambrosia in the sahasrāra represents the state of joy prior to that of non-dualistic realisation. Although this ambrosia has the power to keep the body healthy and bright until it lasts it has a more important function to perform, that of bestowing divine bliss. The Śākta yogin does not, unlike the jñānin, dismiss the body and the world as Māyā: he sees it all as the sport of Ambā, as the manifestation of her Śakti. So this ambrosia enables him to witness the sport of Ambā as long as he wants to dwell in his body. But however long-lived he may be, three hundred years, three thousand years or thirty lakh years, he may at one stage be inspired by the non-dualistic desire to become one with Ambā. Then he too will shed his body.

I spoke of the good snake and the bad snake. The first is the snake of ambrosia, the second that of poison. Subrahmaṇya's peacock and Mahāviṣṇu's Garuḍa destroy poisonous snakes. We call Subrahmaṇya Nāgarāja when he himself is in the aspect of the ambrosial snake. It is the same snake that Mahāviṣṇu has as his couch of Ādiśeṣa. Patañjali who gave us the yogaśāstra is indeed an incarnation of Śeṣa. Although he has not dealt with Kuṇḍalinī yoga, Kuṇḍalinī too (as we know) is a snake.

Like the peacock and Garuḍa the snake has another born enemy, the mongoose, which is called "nakula" in Sanskrit. There is an aspect of Ambā known as Nakuleśvarī. Lalitāmbā, the queen-empress, has a minister known as "Mantriṇī" which name is also applied to Ambā. She is also called "Mātaṅgī". Although only a minister, the queen-empress has endowed her with all her power and authority. "My portfolio will be that of blessing my devotees. You be home minister and rule all my three worlds." Thus she delegates her authority now and then to Mantriṇī. That is the reason why she is called "Mantriṇī-nyasta-rājyadhūḥ" in the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam*, the name meaning, "the one who entrusts the rule of her empire to Mantrinī". This Mātaṅgī is called "Rāja-Mātangī". She is the Mīnāmbikā of Mad(h)urai. It is she whom we describe as the queen with the authority to rule. It is amusing to know that we call her "Nakuleśvarī", the "mongoose goddess". The reason for this: the Kuṇḍalinī snake in the mūlādhāra performs a function that goes against the Ātmic advancement of a man while Nakuleśvarī, as the foe of the snake, blesses us with inward riches.

Mūlādhāra is also known as "kula". In the *Śaundaryalaharī* itself we find the words, "Kulakuṇḍe svapiṣī...": She keeps sleeping in the mūlādhāra without any awareness of the world of the Self. The one who creates the opposite state, making the Ātman to unfold itself, is Nakulī. The opposite of "kula" is "nakula".

Among the three enemies of snakes, Garuḍa, the peacock and the mongoose, there is something special about the first. Garuḍa not only kills poisonous snakes, he is the one who brought amṛta. The mother of snakes is his stepmother. She enslaved his mother and when he requested her to free her she laid down a condition. She said: "I will free your mother if you bring ambrosia from the celestial world to feed my children." Garuḍa went to the celestial world, successfully fought with Indra and returned to earth with the pot of ambrosia. But in the end the snakes could not partake of it -- such is the story. Garuḍa eats snakes, doesn't he? I wanted to speak about his connection with amṛta. In Śrīvilliputtūr, where Āṇḍāḷ[8] descended to earth, Garuḍa is offered a delicacy called "amṛta-kalaśam" and it resembles a *"suyyan" [sukhiyan]* The delicacy is so shaped that its outer part must be regarded as the kalaśa and the stuffing inside (the "pūrṇaṁ") as amṛta.

The "modaka" too represents the same principle. It is mentioned variously that Vighneśvara has a pot of amṛta, a pot of jewels, a pomegranate, a modaka. The kalaśa or pot has gems inside it and likewise the pomegranate looks gemset with seeds in it. The outer covering of the modaka and its stuffing or "purṇaṁ" correspond to the kalaśa or pot and the ambrosia inside it. Garuḍāzhvar[4] is particularly important in Śrīvilliputtūr. If in all other temples (Vaiṣṇava) Garuḍa is in front of Perumāḷ (Viṣṇu); in Śrīvilliputtūr he is by his side in the sanctum itself. Perumāḷ is flanked by Garuḍa and Āṇḍāḷ. There is a story behind this. In Śrīraṅgaṁ, Śrī Raṅganātha made Āṇḍāḷ one with him. Then Periyāzhvār (her foster-father) lamented: "After giving me such a noble foster-child you have snatched her away from me. Is it right on your part to torment me like this?" Thereupon Perumāḷ said to him: "Do not grieve. I will come to Śrīvilliputtūr and after marrying Āṇḍāḷ in the proper manner reside there permanently." It was then that, in the twinkling of an eye, Garuḍa brought them to Śrīvilliputtūr. It was in appreciation of this act of Garuḍa that Perumāḷ has him also by his side as an equal of Āṇḍāḷ. It is believed that Periyāzhvār himself is an aspect of Garuḍa.

As we have seen, Garuḍa is associated with amṛta or ambrosia and he frees people from poison. The Ācārya says that he who meditates on Ambā as one made of the Candrakānta stone and emitting ambrosial rays will, like Garuḍa, control the poison of snakes. "Sa sarpāṇām darpam śamayati śakuntādhipa iva". "Śakuntādhipa" means king of birds, that is Garuḍa. "Śakunta" means bird. The child born to Menakā and abandoned by her was cared for by birds : that is why she came to be called "Śakuntalā". "Pakṣirāja" is a name found among Ayyangārs [Tamil Vaiṣṇava Brāhmins]; the name means Garuḍa, king of birds. They say Vaiṣṇavas do not call themselves *"Periya Tiruvaḍi"* or "Garuḍa" but "Pakṣirāja". But the name "Garuḍācār" is common among Mādhvas[g].

By reciting this verse (20) you will get twofold relief, from poison caused by snake bites or any insect or animal bite and from viral fever. After all viral fever is caused by viruses entering the body.

Another point, about fever in general. As mentioned here, if a man keeps meditating on Ambā as one with rays that rain nectar, he himself will come to have an "amṛta nāḍi," an ambrosial nerve, or we may take it that the ambrosia in his sahasrāra will flow in his nerves. Such a man, one who has his eyes with nectarine nerves, has to do no more than glance at one suffering from fever, and the fever will vanish in a trice." "Jvarapḷuṣṭān dṛṣṭyā sukhayati sudhādhārasirayā".

Notes

[1] Garuḍa, king of birds, vehicle of Viṣṇu. As a common noun, garuḍa denotes the eagle.

[2] Nāgarāja literally means king of snakes.

[3] The cobra is known among Tamiḷs as *"nallapāmpu"* or a "good snake".

[4] "Garuḍāzhvār" = "Garuḍa + Āzhvār. Āzhvārs are saint - poets adored by Tamiḷ Vaiṣṇavas who worship Garuḍa himself as an Āzhvār.

Chapter 57

The Importance of Red

The Inner Meaning of "Attraction"

Although Ambā is the colour of crystal, she is spoken of here as having the complexion of the Śrīvidyā deity, *i.e.* red. Red indeed is what gives her distinction. Does not the sky become red during sunrise? If a man meditates on Ambā, imagining that the lustre of her body casts redness not only on the sky but on everything from the sky to the earth, that all cosmos acquires a redness, he will be blessed with the power of attraction. This is mentioned in an earlier stanza (18). We must not be attracted by this subject of attraction. It can lead us to wrong things. That is why I made a "high jump" and came to a later stanza. However, I wished to speak about the special quality of the redness of Ambā and I turned to that stanza because I thought it would be a good idea to speak about the inner meaning of what is called "attraction" (or bringing people under one's influence or power).

"Vaśīkaram", "strīvaśyam", obtaining the beauty of Manmatha and so on are dealt with in the *Saundaryalaharī* and similar Śākta works. It would be perilous to understand them in a literal sense. When a man tries to attract others what happens in reality? It means he himself has been attracted by them; he therefore uses the vaśya mantra in order to possess them, to hold them in his power. When he amasses money, acquires a house and landed property, he believes that he is the owner of all these assets. But in reality it is he who is owned by them, who is enslaved by them. When he is deprived of what he owns he suffers. Does it not mean, then, that he is subject to them. If a man attempts vaśyam, *i.e.* tries to bring an object or person under his control or possession, in reality it is he who is a victim of that act of vaśyam since he is enslaved by the object or person that is the target of his vaśya mantra. To put it differently, he becomes a slave to the desire of bringing others under his influence. If such is the case, the way will remain closed for him to meditate on Ambā, to have her always in his mind and reach eventually the ultimate objective of Self-realisation.

Do you think that the Ācārya, other great men and seers who propounded the mantra śāstra would have taught such a method [which would prevent a man from reaching higher goals]? When the Ācārya speaks of the mental state of the devotees of Ambā he says: "Mṛdita malamāyena manasā" (Stanza 21). It means that the mind of the devotee will be free of all impure thoughts and desires, that it will keep Māyā suppressed. The man who worships Ambā must perform a "Kāliṅga mardana" of Māyā [he must keep Māyā crushed in the same way as Kṛṣṇa subdued the dread serpent Kāliṅga]. It would not be just to associate him, the devotee of Ambā, with inferior and unsavoury forms of vaśya. So we have to understand what is said about vaśya thus: that the sādhaka, the devout practitioner or seeker in question, does not become subject to the attraction or influence of anything and that his mind is always under control. That which he is said to have brought under his power (that is that which is subject to his vaśya) is to be understood as something that has been absorbed in him. It is like what the Lord says in the Gītā[1]: "Samudram āpaḥ praviśanti yadvat tadvat kāmā yam praviśanti sarve." Like all rivers drawn by the ocean into it and brought under its control — so does not becoming "vaśya" mean "drawn"? After all the rivers are drawn into the ocean. Can the ocean relate to the rivers as an independent entity, or can the rivers relate to the ocean as independent entities? The two, the rivers together and the ocean, become one non-dualistic entity--and "śāntim āpnoti", that is become utterly tranquil.

It is the same case with the jñānin: all desires flow into him and he reaches a state in which these desires are annihilated. The desire for objects that exist as dual outwardly are internalised by him (by the jñānin) and this is figuratively spoken of as "vaśya". If you make an object not merely your own but make it yourself how can it remain an independent entity inspiring desire in you for it? If all the three worlds are drawn into a man (vaśya) in the form of a woman, it means that the cosmos itself is not external to him but part of him, that is within him. And if he himself becomes like Manmatha[2], how can Manmatha triumph over him, pushing him into kāma? So the fact of a man assuming the appearance of Manmatha means he accomplishes Kāmajaya (conquest of Kāma); that is how the idea of one assuming the form of Manmatha must be understood.

Ambā performs a twofold function: she turns Parameśvara into the act of creation and turns human beings back into the state of liberation. In the Śrīvidyā system she is referred to as bright red in colour. Pārvatī is green, Gaurī is white though she is also mentioned as being yellow. Kālī is dark, while Durgā is blue. Our Kāmeśvarī is red like aruṇodaya, red like the sky before sunrise.

What is specially remarkable about this red? To explain in terms of the physics of light: red indicates Śiva and Śakti creating the universe and, on the reverse side, the act of dissolution, of transcending creation and becoming one with the Ultimate.

When red separates itself first from sunlight which is white (and does not belong to the category of any colour), the other six colours of VIBGYOR are revealed. In the seven letters of VIBGYOR the colours are revealed beginning with the last letter. The end colour R is red. When it becomes separated, orange (O), yellow (Y) green (G), blue (B), indigo (I), and violet (V) are revealed. Beyond R, at the right-hand end, is white which does not belong to any category of colour; and adjacent to V, at the left-hand end, is black which too does not belong to any category of colour. Why are black and white not included among the colours? We see various objects which have various colours. One is green, another is blue. The object that is seen as green reflects green and absorbs all other light waves. The same is the case with a blue object: it reflects blue and absorbs all other light waves. Light waves pervade everywhere and we see two phenomena with regard to them. One kind of light wave is reflected (by objects) and all other light waves are absorbed. What is reflected or revealed is called its colour. A white object does not absorb any light wave and reflects all light waves. The reflected colours together form white. Of the two phenomena of reflection and absorption there is only one in the case of a white object — reflection. That is why white is not included among the colours. In the case of a black object it absorbs all light waves and does not reflect any. Here too we see only one of the two phenomena, absorption.

We speak of the three guṇas, sattva, rajas and tamas[g]. That which does not hold within itself anything as its own and releases everything outside and that which is pure, bright and white is sattva. It is the mark of jñāna and the Parabrahman. That which holds or retains everything as its own is black and it is tamas and utter ajñāna or nescience. Red is rajas, that is kriyāśakti, the power of doing, of action, energy. The act of turning the Brahman into the individual Self and the act of taking the individual Self back into the Brahman: it is kriyāśakti that is behind both. From Śiva, that is the nature of jñāna, functionless and white, has originated Parāśakti to become manifest as the bright red Kāmeśvarī. Following this has occurred all creation leading up to nescience that is tamas. The seven colours, VIBGYOR, are steps that represent the variety of creation. All the colours mingling together will form white. All this cosmos arose from the Brahman that is pure and it will cease itself by becoming the Brahman again. The primordial cause of all this universe, creation, arising from the white Brahman, is the entity that first emerged from it, the red Kāmeśvarī. That is why redness has a special importance. If the process is reversed and all of us who are steeped in the darkness of tamas are to become dissolved in white it is the "lady in red" who will show the way[3].

The great joy of becoming united in love can be experienced only when such union takes place after separation. It is only after being separated from each other that any two can meet again. Without such separation, if one remains by oneself, where can there be the joy of oneing? That is the reason why the primordial entity separates itself into Śiva and Śakti, then the two become the Kāmeśvara-Kāmeśvarī couple and thereafter the primordial entity divides itself in creation as its children. Looked at in this way it is to experience love and affection that the Root entity, that is white, becomes red. That is why love, specifically erotic love (śṛṅgāra), is said to be red.

The root of creation is red. The primordial entity which had no desire was inspired by desire: this was the prime cause of creation. That is why creation is said to be red. The one who performs the function of creation, Brahmā, is red-complexioned. There is life in any sentient being because of blood circulation. And blood is red. In fact the Sanskrit word for blood, "rakta", itself means red. What does the poet do? He creates his poem with his desire. By imparting his experience he thereby brings about a kind of union with others. That is why the poetic gift is understood to be red.

Compassion is the manifestation of love in its mature form. It is the highest form of all love, flowing from the fountain that is the Paramātman.

That is why it is said later in the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 93): "The entity called Śambhu, that is the colourless Parabrahman, assumes the form of aruṇa (red) for the purpose of protecting the world; indeed becomes aruṇa out of his karuṇa or compassion; and goes about triumphantly" ("Jagat trātum Śambhor jayati karuṇā kācidaruṇā"). In the previous stanza the Ācārya says: "The light of your redness, falling on Parameśvara who is as bright as a crystal, makes him an embodiment of love (śṛṇgāra)".

We already know that sattva is white, and rajas is red. We also know that rajas is inferior to sattva. Then why is red so much glorified here? There must, of course, be two for the phenomenon called love which is part of dualism. When love manifests itself in the Brahman, which is non-dual, sāttvik and pure white, it becomes rājasik red of the most exalted kind.

The individual Self finds fulfilment in being in the quiescent, serene and sāttvik state. When a man does work in a rājasik manner he loses his serenity and is thereby diminished. But the serene Paramātman? Even when he is engaged in the phenomenal world he does so with his tranquillity undisturbed. His true body that is like crystal remains as it is and the red is just reflected in it. So there is no diminution in his case.

We must advance from the wrong kind of rajas to its finest and noblest manifestation and Īśvara will through his compassion and love, which are the highest of the high aspects of rajas, raise us to the state of Brahman which is beyond all qualities (like sattva, rajas and tamas).

Kundumaṇi^{g}, bitter gourd and *pādiri* fruit, all three are red. But in quality they are so different from one another. *Kundumaṇi* is poisonous; bitter gourd, though bitter (as the name itself suggests), is beneficial to the body; and the *padiri* fruit is sweet to taste and at the same time good for the body. In the same way there are different states of rajoguṇa^{g} with different characteristics: the rajas that keeps you bound, the rajas that has the goal of liberation, the rajas that lifts you up to the state of liberation. The redness of Kāmeśvarī is the redness that elevates you.

It is not at all proper to regard the redness that frees us from bondage as a vaśya force, as something that keeps us under its power or influence.

The Ācārya observes (Stanza 18) that one must meditate on Ambā's red colour as "Śrīsaraṇi" that wipes away everything from the sky down to the earth. "Śrī" denotes all that is fortunate and auspicious, the richness that fills the Self. In this hymn Ambā's beauty is referred to as "Śrī". "Saraṇi" means the same as laharī, a wave, a flood. So "Śrīsaraṇi" is the same as "Saundaryalaharī".

One of the early stanzas (12) begins with the words "Tvadīyam saundaryam" (the beauty that is yours). Here "Śrīsaraṇi" occurs as a synonym for "Saundaryalaharī". It is an indication that the "Ānandalaharī" section has the goal of taking us to "Saundaryalaharī". Yantra and mantra śāstras and philosophical concepts, the purpose of all is to enable us to behold the beauty of Ambā.

This beauty, this beautiful form, is "contained" in the image created through the keśādi-pādānta[g] description. But the effulgence radiating from her red complexion fills the entire universe.

In the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam* Ambā's weapons are mentioned before the keśādi-pādānta description. The weapons and other objects held in the hands of a deity are referred to only when the portrayal, starting from the tresses of hair, comes down to the hands. But in the *Sahasranāmam* they occur earlier. First the noose, then the goad, the bow and arrows. Besides, what we have is not a mere listing of the weapons but the concept or principle behind each. When mentioning the noose (pāśa) it starts with the word "rāga": "Rāgasvarūpa-pāśāḍhyā". "Rāga" denotes both red and desire. Here it is the right type of rāga, that which frees us from the bondage caused by the wrong type of rāga and binds us with Ambā. Dveṣa or hatred must be completely eradicated. For this purpose there must be hatred against hatred, anger against anger: they must both be pierced again and again with the goad and kept under check. Then we must offer our five sense organs and our mind at her feet. I have already told you that it is to attract them that she wields the bow and the arrows. Only after this would you be enabled to behold her from head to foot.

Before we are enabled to see her in this form, before we can see her in a form of certain proportions, we can see only her red colour pervading all universe, all space. So prior to mentioning her name that suggests the beauty of her hair, the *Sahasranāmam* has this: "Nijāruṇaprabhāpūramajjad-brahmāṇḍa-maṇḍalā". It means the same as what is mentioned in the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 18): "Divam sarvam urvīm aruṇimānimagnām". We become immersed in the red of her love and compassion and our own love arising from devotion increases. We will then, at once, be afforded a glimpse of Ambā from head to foot.

Ambā's first name in the *Sahasranāmam,* "Śrīmāta", indicates that she is the Mother of all of us, the one who created us. The next name, "Mahārājñī", suggests that she protects and sustains us. The third name is "Simhāsaneśvarī". "Siṁha" denotes "hiṁsā", violence, destruction. These functions, creation, sustenance and destruction, are the sport of cit-jyotis, the light of consciousness [Ambā]. Denoting that primordial śakti or power is the name "Cidagnikuṇḍa-saṁbhūtā". That which knows no origin, citśakti (the power of consciousness or jñāna) appeared in the form of Lalitāmbā is obliquely hinted at in this very name, but clearly stated in the next. To free the celestials from the atrocities perpetrated on them by Bhaṇḍāsura, Citśakti took birth as Lalitāmbā. This is implied in the name "Devakaryasamudyatā". The celestials, unable to bear the sufferings inflicted on them by the asuras, offer their bodies to Ambā by sacrificing themselves in the fire. When their inert bodies had perished and their life remained as cit, Ambā, the source of all cit, appeared as Lalitā and restored the celestials to life. (Later she slew Bhaṇḍasura.) All this is implied in the name, "Cidagnikuṇḍasambhūta".

The names of Ambā mentioned first in the *Sahasranāmam* indicate her three functions [creation, sustenance and dissolution] and the context in which she appeared as Lalitāmbā. The name occurring after these points to the redness of her lustre, "Udyadbhānu-sahasrābhā,", one whose colour is that of a thousand rising suns.

Immediately after mentioning Ambā's red complexion her four hands[4] and the four weapons wielded by her are noted (we had seen their names earlier). Then comes her name indicating that her red colour wipes away all the realms of the universe.

The reason why, after starting with the tresses of Ambā's hair, her hands are dealt with before depicting the body in between is to make known that she is kriyāśakti, the creative energy. After all, has not the functionless Brahman become Ambā so as to perform certain functions?

"Kārya" is what the kara (hand) does. Hence the hands of Ambā are mentioned first. It is icchāśakti (the power of desire) that supports the kriyā on both sides. That is why the name "Udyadbhānu-sahasrābhā" comes before the description of the hands and after it occurs the name "Nijārunaprabhāpūra-majjad-brahmāṇḍa-maṇḍalā". The words used by the Ācārya mean the same: "Divam sarvam urvīm aruṇimanimagnā".

Notes & References

[1] Āpūryamāṇam acala-pratiṣṭhaṁ
Samudram āpaḥ praviśanti yadvat
Tadvat kāmā yam praviśanti sarve
Sa śāntim āpnoti na kāma-kāmī
— *Bhagavadgītā*, 2. 70

[2] Idea contained in the *Saundaryalaharī*, 19.

[3] In his discourse on various gods and goddesses the Mahāsvāmī takes up the subject of colour in a fascinating manner. (See section on Puranas, *Hindu Dharma*.)

[4] The name in question is "Caturbāhu-samanvitā."

Chapter 58

The "Sahasranāmam" and The "Saundaryalaharī"

Here [the reference is to the concluding sentence of the previous chapter] what is said in the *Saundaryalaharī* seems like an exact impression of the description of Ambā as found in the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam.* There are any number of instances of the correspondence between the two works. If one were to conduct a research into the subject it would become a "study" on its own. In the latter part of his hymn the Ācārya closely follows the *Sahasranāmam* in his depiction of Ambā.

Ambā's forehead looks like the half-moon inverted, says the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 46) which is an improvement on the *Sahasranāmam's* "Aṣṭamīcandra-vibhrāja-dalika-sthala-śobhitā". The Ācārya says that when Ambā opens her eyes the worlds are created, that when she closes them it is the deluge of dissolution (Stanza 55) which reminds us of "Unmeṣa-nimiṣotpanna-vipanna-bhuvanāvalī" of the *Sahasranāmam.* In the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 62) it is mentioned that the red coral branch growing in the sea (vidrumalatā) is no match for Ambā's lips. The same idea is expressed in the *Sahasranāmam* with the name, "Navavidrumabimbaśrī-nyakkāri-radanacchadā". Ambā's speech excels in sweetness the song played on the vīṇā by Sarasvatī: this is what is meant by the name in the *Sahasranāmam*, "Nijasallāpa-mādhurya-vinirbhartsita-kacchapī". The same idea the Ācārya has developed into an entre stanza (66) in his hymn: "Vipañcyā gāyantī..." When describing Ambā from head to foot, he brings in some appropriate comparison or other but in some contexts he feels his comparisons are not adequate. In one stanza (67) he asks: "How can I describe your chin which is incomparable?" "Kathamkāram brūmastava cubukam aupamyarahitam?" In the *Sahasranāmam* also the name referring to the chin implies that it cannot be compared to anything: "Anākalita-sādṛśya-cubukaśrī-virājitā" — "one who shines with the beauty of her chin that has no comparison". In the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 83) Ambā's leg is said to be the quiver containing the arrows Manmatha has gathered to gain victory over Parameśvara. The source of this idea is the *Sahasranāmam,* which has the name, "Indragopa-parikṣipta-smara-tūnābha-jaṅghikā". The Ācārya says (in Stanza 84) that Ambā's feet shine as they are placed on the head of Mother Veda (Śruti-śiras), while the *Sahasranāmam* says with much beauty that the sindura smeared on the parting of the hair of Mother Veda is made by the dust on Ambā's feet: "Śrutisīmantasindūrīkṛta-pādābjadhūlikā". In the *Sahasranāmam* occurs this name: "Padadvayaprabhājālaparākṛtasaroruhā". It means that the lotus is put to shame by the lustre of Ambā's feet. The Ācārya elaborates the same idea in his verse (87) starting with the words, "Himānī-hantavyam" and states how the lotus is overcome by shame by Ambā's feet. The idea is explained through the different ways in which the lotus is put to shame by the goddess's feet. One: the lotus wilts in the snow, while Ambā's feet do not because the mountain of snow is Ambā's place of birth and she was also married there [her parents' home as well as her husband's home is the abode of snow]. So her feet always find delight in being in the snow. Two: at dusk the lotus closes its petals while Ambā's feet are always ablossom so to speak. Three: the lotus has Lakṣmī with it. Does not Lakṣmī reside in the lotus? The feet of Ambā dispense wealth (Lakṣmī) to those who adore them. "Your feet triumph over the lotus,",the Ācārya concludes thus.

"Kūrmapṛṣṭha-jayiṣṇu-prapadānvitā" is one of the names of Ambā in the *Sahasranāmam:* it means "one whose upper feet (insteps) are superior to the back of a tortoise. In the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 88) the Ācārya says: "Prapadamapadam ..kaṭhina-kamaṭhī-karpara-tulām". The tortoise is known as kūrma, kamaṭa and kacchapa.

In one stanza (91), the Ācārya observes that the auspicious jewel-studded anklets that Ambā wears on her feet jingle: "Subhagamaṇi-mañjīra-raṇita... caraṇa-kamalam". Here not only the idea, even the words, follow the *Sahasranāmam* text: "Śiñjāna-maṇi-mañjīra-maṇḍita-srīpadāmbujā".

If you examine the two texts closely, the *Saundaryalaharī* and the *Sahasranāmam,* you will find more such parallels.

Should the Acarya have used in his hymn words and ideas from the *Sahasranāmam* ? The answer is that what he has done shows in a sense not only his greatness but also his humility. If he had borrowed ideas and words from a lesser known work he could be accused of plagiarism. But the *Sahasranāmam* is a work not only widely known among devotees of Śrīvidyā, it is also a text of great importance. If he borrows anything from such a work does it not show how he respects it, how he is devoted to it? And does it not also mean that in his humility he feels he cannot say anything more than what it has already said [in the stanzas of the work from which he has borrowed]? No example is needed other than his own descriptions in the *Saundaryalaharī* to prove his wealth of imagination and originality. His pādādi-keśa and keśādi-pāda[g] hymns to Śiva and Viṣṇu are replete with ideas that arise from an original creative mind. That being the case, he could have, if he had wished, given his own descriptions of Ambā in the stanzas where he has drawn from the *Sahasranāmam;* and these descriptions would have been such as to arouse our wonder. If he has not done so, and has instead borrowed from the *Sahasranāmam,* it means that he wants to show his esteem for it and at the same time wants others too to respect it.

Thus we can look at it [the Ācārya drawing words and ideas from the *Sahasranāmam*] in a human way and interpret the same in a humble manner. Or, considering the fact that he was a divine incarnation, explain his conduct on a lofty plane. Who was, or who is, the Ācārya? He was an incarnation of Īśvara together with Ambā. It is not that he is one and Ambā another. [He is the same as Ambā.] And who created the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam*? The Vāgdevatās known as the Viśinyādi śaktis. It was Ambā herself who granted them the power to compose the work. All speech is her property, all words. And there is no doubt that the words revealed by the Vāgdevatās are Ambā's own. She bade the Vāgdevatās thus: "For the well-being of the world create a hymn consisting of my various names." It is said that Ambā not only bade them compose the hymn but also cast her sidelong glance on them and thereby endowed them with the power to carry out her bidding[1]. When she herself appeared as the Ācārya [as her incarnation] to compose a hymn there is nothing wrong in his incorporating in it ideas from the *Sahasranāmam*. Is it wrong to take a seedling from our own farm and plant it in the garden we want to make in the backyard of our house? The Ācārya himself says, as he concludes his hymn, that the work was created out of Ambā's own words: "Tvadiyābhiḥ vāgbhiḥ".

In the Gītā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Paramātman has used a number of words and ideas from Śruti texts like the *Kaṭhopaniṣad*. In the beginning these Śruti (or Vedic) mantras were part of his very breath. Later they occurred to the minds of seers (they were revealed to them) through his own grace. So, with a sense of liberty, he included here and there in the Gītā words found in the Śruti. Similar is the case with the Ācārya drawing upon the *Sahasranāmam* in composing his *Saundaryalaharī*.

In the next stanza (21) the Ācārya speaks about those who are adepts in the Kuṇḍalinī yoga becoming immersed in the flood of Brahmānanda (bliss of knowing the Brahman). He terms the flood of bliss as "āhlādalaharī". This is one of many laharīs in the "Ānandalaharī-Saundaryalaharī" hymn. Ambā's laharī of beauty, the Ācārya's laharī of inner experience, the laharī of grace, the laharī of poetry : there is a confluence of all these in the *Saundaryalaharī*. It is in this stanza (21) that the Ācārya speaks of Ambā's devotee having "crushed the impurities of his mind and Māyā": "Mṛdita-malamāyena manasā...."

Note

It seems the Great Seer has made this observation based on Stanzas 38 and 39 of the first section of the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam*.

Chapter 59

From "Dāso'ham" to "So'ham"

The next stanza (22) is of great interest. Did I not tell you that the "Ānandalaharī" section not only dealt with the Śākta śāstra, that it also contained verses noted for their devotional fervour and poetic excellence. This śloka (22) is a good example of such a combination. In it, through the figure of speech called "śleṣa" (pun), we are lifted up from dualistic devotion to a sort of non-dualistic state in which devotion, Śakti and jñāna are mingled.

I wonder whether you paid close attention to what I said. I didn't say, "from dualistic devotion to jñāna". I said the Ācārya lifted us up through this stanza to *a sort of* non-dualistic state in which jñāna is mingled with devotion and Śakti. We can understand the idea properly only by following the verse from the very beginning.

Bhavāni tvam dāse mayi vitara dṛṣṭim sakuraṇām
Iti stotum vāñchan kathayati Bhavānī tvāmiti yaḥ
Tadaiva tvam tasmai diśasi nijasāyujya-padavīm
Mukunda-Brahmendra-sphuṭa-makuṭa-nīrājitapadām.

"Bhavāni" = "Mother Bhavāni."

"Bhava" is one of the names of Śiva. Bhava's Śakti is "Bhavānī". Bhava, Śarvā, Īśāna, Paśupati, Rudra, Ugra, Bhīma, Mahān (Mahādeva): these are the special eight names of Śiva that is Aṣṭamūrti. The one who "exists" as the root or source of creatures is Bhava, one who exists is Bhava. His wife Ambā is "Bhavānī".

"Tvam" = you; "dāse mayi" = in me who is your dāsa or minion; "sakaruṇām" = with compassion; "dṛṣṭim vitara" = cast your glance. "Mother Bhavāni, cast your glance on me, your glance that is your grace." "Iti" = thus; ("may you cast thus"); "yaḥ" = whoever. (There is no question of his -- yaḥ -- being big or small, deserving or not deserving. Whatever be his nature or character, if he desires Ambā's sidelong glance....) "Stotum vāñchan" = desiring to adore; "Bhavāni tvam dāse mayi vitara dṛṣṭim sakuraṇām". Speaking these words, desirous of praying for her sidelong glance — immediately after having said the first two words, "Bhavāni tvam"... "Bhavāni tvam iti yah kathayati": the second line means "whoever says 'Bhavani tvam'". The word "tadaiva", with which the third line begins, means "at once".

He [that is the one referred to above as "whoever"] begins to utter the two words ["Bhavani tvam"] to pray for Ambā's sidelong glance. And at once ....

What happens at once?

"Tadaiva tvam tasmai diśasi nijasāyujya padavīm".

"Tadaiva" = at once, the very same moment. That is when someone, whoever it be, speaks the first line of this stanza as a prayer for Ambā's sidelong glance... No, he does not speak the entire line but only the first two words, "Bhavani tvam". And at once "tvam" = you; "tasmai" = for him; "nija" = your, what is yours, what is natural to you, your own.... "nija sāyujya padavīm" = your own state of sāyujya, of becoming one with you. To understand the same correctly, "the state of becoming yourself".... That someone, the moment he utters the two words ("Bhavāni tvam"), becomes you. Whoever pronounces the first two words of the stanza is granted by you śāyujya at once, the state of his becoming yourself. "Diśasi" means "you give, grant".

"When a man wishes to pray to you thus: 'Bhavāni, cast on me, your minion, your sidelong glance of compassion, that is when he starts saying 'Bhavāni tvam', you grant him sāyujya in which he becomes one with you." This is the meaning of the first three lines of the stanza.

The goal of a seeker is becoming inseparably one with the object of his devotion, that is sāyujya. What is mentioned here (in this stanza) is not non-dualistic union with the Nirguṇa Brahman^g obtained through jñāna. I say so on the basis of the fourth line of the stanza. It says: "Mukunda Brahmendra-sphuṭa-makuṭa-nīrājitapadām".

Mukunda, as you must already know, is Viṣṇū; "Brahmendra" does not mean Sadāśiva Brahmendra^g. It means Brahmā and Indra. "Sphuṭa makuṭa" = glittering crown. "Nīrājita padām" is the concluding phrase. "Nīrājana" means the same as "dīpārādhana", worshipping by waving lamps before a deity. The one whose dīpārādhana is performed is "nīrājita". "Padām" = the feet (whose dīpārādhana has been performed). "You grant the sāyujya of attaining your feet whose dīpārādhana has been performed by the crowns worn by Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Indra and so on."

What is the meaning of "dīpārādhana of Ambā's feet performed with the crowns"? Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Indra and others prostrate themselves before Ambā and, as they do so, they keep their heads at her feet. Then the lustre of the crowns worn by them falls on them, her feet. And this is like performing dīpārādhana for her feet.

If the devotee becomes one with Amba, obtains sāyujya with her, it will mean that dīpārādhana is performed to his feet with the crowns worn by Viṣnu, Brahmā, Indra and others, so states the Ācārya. When he becomes one with Ambā, will not his feet be the same as those of the goddess?

It is different when one takes the path of jñāna and attains non-dualistic sāyujya. In this state there is no question of a deity with feet and other limbs. Since there will be neither creation nor sustenance there will be neither Brahmā nor Viṣṇu. Here, in this stanza, it is a case of what I have told you of "saprapañcam", which implies the existence of the cosmos, worldly affairs and a deity with attributes. [It is niṣprapañca in non-dualistic sāyujya, that is there is no cosmos in it and it is union with an entity that has no attributes.] So what is mentioned here is not the sāyujya spoken of in Advaita.

The Parabrahman becomes the Parāśakti to be the cause of the universe and as its queen-empress she appoints celestials like Brahmā and Indra to conduct its affairs. Her position is so exalted that these celestials fall at her feet. The sāyujya mentioned here is that of the jivātman, the individual Self, achieving sāyujya with Parāśakti. In other words the individual Self becomes one with Parāśakti, that is becomes Parāśakti.

An interesting point to note is that even in the Advaita system there is mention of such a state, though it is not its goal. Its ultimate state is

Nirguṇa, being unconditioned and absolute; it is one of peace and it is not associated with Śakti or with any function. However, if Īśvara (Parāśakti is called Īśvara in the non-dualistic system) does something, can we say, "I am an Advaitin, don't do that"? Even if you are able to say so, will he listen to you? Who can compel him to listen to you? So he demonstrates his sport before the Advaitin also. That is the reason why in some Upaniṣadic passages, while speaking about the man who has no desire or who has no will or resolve of his own, it is stated, "He gets all that he desires. All that he wills or resolves to do is accomplished[1]." What does this mean? That he obtains "aisvaryam", that is the state of being Īśvara. Even if he goes on the path of jñāna and wishes to be one with the Nirguṇa Brahman or the entity without attributes, Saguṇa Parāśakti tells him, "Be one with me also and playing the drama of Śakti go to the state of samādhi." Even after reaching that state of samādhi she will involve him in the drama and sport of Śakti in this world of work and action without his samādhi being interrupted.

The one who is made to do all this will not remain merely powerful in the end. Mere power will imply authority and the ego-sense accompanying it, but no experience of the divine, of the divine rasa. But the man who is not merely "powerful" and has the grace of Parāśakti will be engaged in the dance of Śakti, experiencing the divine; he will ever have the consciousness of the divine and will mingle with Parāśakti with devotion and come face to face with her. Then, when he goes to a higher plane, he will not reveal his Śakti himself nor will he manifest his will or desire. With the knowledge gained that all the frenetic activity and dance are both hers and his at the same time, he will remain experiencing beatitude. This devotion to Ambā will be of a sublime nature. But, beneath all, there will be the awareness of serenity arising from the realisation that the basis of Saguṇa Parāśakti (Parāśakti with attributes) is Nirguṇa (the entity without attributes, that is unconditioned). It is the serenity perceived by the man going on the path of jñāna.

So here the Ācārya deals with sāyujya in which aspects of jñāna, devotion and Śakti are mingled, not the realisation of the Brahman taught in the Advaitik texts.

All this is fine. But what about the śleṣa or pun I referred to earlier? Without speaking about it, I am expatiating on philosophical concepts.

When a devotee says, "Bhavāni tvam", does it not mean, according to the Ācārya, that Ambā grants him sāyujya, that she makes him herself? The Ācārya has made a pun on the words, "Bhavāni tvam".

A pun is using a word [or words that sound the same or similar] with two meanings. So when the devotee says "Bhavāni tvam" in one sense, Ambā responds by making it the experience of a truth in another sense. The devotee says in the sense, "Bhavani, you." How does Ambā take its meaning and make it an experience of sāyujya for the devotee?

The word "Bhavāni" yields two meanings. It is a noun and in another sense a verb. "Bhava" is its verbal root and it too yields two meanings, one as a noun and another as a verb. Then, with the suffix "ni", the word "Bhavāni" also (as mentioned earlier) has two meanings. "Bhava" as a noun means Śiva and so Bhavānī is Bhava's wife, Ambā. "Bhava" as a verb means "may you be". You see such usage in these examples: "Dīrghasumaṅgalībhava", "Dīrghāyuṣmānbhava"; "Jayavijayī bhava".

Take the words "bhavān" and "bhavati." The root of "bhavān" is "bhavat". "Bhavān", "Bhavati", mean respectively "Sir", "Madam"—and they convey respect. "Bhavatī" in the nominative, with a long ī, becomes "Bhavati" in the vocative. The grammatically correct form of addressing a lady is "He Bhavati". But in common usage it is "Bhavati" alone. "Madam, give me alms": the equivalent of this is "Bhavati, bhikṣām dehi". "Bhavān" also in the nominative ends with a long syllable, while in the vocative it is short, "He Bhavan".

If in our stanza (22) the Ācārya has played on the word "Bhavāni", his disciple Toṭakacārya has indulged in such verbal play with reference to the Ācārya himself when he says of him:[2] "Bhava eva Bhavān". "Bhavān" is a respectful form of addressing a person. "Bhava eva Bhavān" means "You are Bhava", that is "You are indeed Parameśvara".

We were speaking about "Bhavāni" having two meanings. As a verb "bhava" means "be". "Bhavāni" will then mean "I will be" or "May I be". So if in "Bhavāni tvam" "Bhavāni" is taken to be a verb the two words will mean "May I be you" ("May I become you").

In Tamiḷ and English the words must be in a certain order in a sentence [the syntax is important]. Not so in Sanskrit. "Bhavāni tvam" can be written as "Tvam Bhavāni". "Tvam" = you; "Bhavāni" = I will be "I will be you."

Ambā who grants her blessings in heaps would, it seems, understand the words thus (as stated above). "My child [my devotee] has spoken so. He says he will be I [or colloquially "me"]. His words should not be belied." In her supreme compassion she bestows sāyujya on him, oneness with herself.

As for the devotee, he feels he does not merit Ambā's motherly affection and so he does not regard himself as her child. He abases himself as her minion and, as a servant of hers, he prays for her sidelong glance, which itself he feels is a great blessing. "Dāse mayi vitara dṛṣṭim sakaruṇām iti stotum vāñchan." Actually, the person in question may be a good-for-nothing fellow. That is why words like "sādhu" and "sūti" [a learned or wise man] are not used where a mere "yaḥ" occurs. "Yaḥ" can be anybody. He may not know what is sāyujya, may not know even a word like "sāyujya". However, when he utters the word, "I will become you" ("Bhavāni tvam") Ambā will answer his prayer and grant him sāyujya.

Bhagavān is the Lord and "I am his dāsa" (which means the devotee is a minion of the Lord): to be two separate entities like this even in the liberated state is dualism. Ambikā grants non-dualistic liberation even to one who has a dualistic attitude. But, as for now, it is Saguṇa Advaita (union with an entity that has attributes). But the one who grants this will also grant Advaitik union that is Nirguṇa (that is with an entity that has no attributes).

Añjaneyasvāmī is one who keeps repeating "Dāso'ham", "Dāso'ham". And he rose to the state of "So'ham". [From the state of the minion of the Lord he reached the state of becoming the Lord.] But even after advancing to that state he remains a minion of Rāma. "Dāso'ham" = "dāsaḥ ahaṁ" = "I am a dāsa" (in Tamiḷ, *"aḍiyen"*). "So'ham" = "Saḥ aham" = "He (the Paramātman) is I". The Ācārya says that all those who go to Ambā saying "Dāso'ham" are raised to the state of their declaring themselves "So'ham".

"I am the Brahman" ("Aham Brahmāsmi") is a pronouncement a person makes on his own and "That art thou" ("Tat tvam asi") is a pronouncement the guru makes to his disciple. A seeker who meditates on these two mahāvākyas[g] may find the goal (becoming one with the Brahman) beyond his reach however much he exerts himself for the same. But Ambā grants him that state in her compassion without her being asked for the same. "Bhavāni tvam": these words of the Ācārya constitute a mahāvākya which goes even further than the Vedic mahāvākyas.

The pun in the stanza consists in this: "Bhavāni tvam" means not only "You Bhavāni" but also "I will become you".

But there is also a third meaning appropriate to the pun here. "Tvam", when it is not an independent word but a suffix of a word, means the quality of something, that is the quality of what is denoted by the word to which the suffix "tvam" is added: it means "thatness". For instance, "kavitvam" means the quality of poetry. When we say that so and so attained "amaratvam" it means he became immortal. ["Amara" = immortal; "amaratvam" = immortality.] In this way if "Bhavani" and "tvam" are read together as one word, (instead of two), the meaning will be Parāśakti's Bhavanihood [what makes Bhavānī Bhavānī] that is "Bhavāni-tvam". When a man starts praying to Ambā for her sidelong glance, what does the goddess do? Before giving him the opportunity to say the next word she interrupts and tells him, "Yes, child, there is indeed a state in which you become I"— and blesses him with the state of Bhāvanī or Bhavānitvam.

So what we must do is to become Ambā's minion and sincerely pray for her sidelong glance. Since the Ācārya has used the word "yaḥ", you should not mistake the line to mean that even a good-for - nothing man can obtain oneness with her by merely uttering the words, "Bhavāni tvam", without being moved by devotion for her. One must truly lower oneself to be her slave, pray with whole-hearted devotion, to be graced by her sidelong glance.

We see here in this stanza that the devotee did not say his prayer fully; he merely wished to say it and spoke just the first two words of the prayer. By then Ambā had granted him more than the blessing he would have asked for had he said his prayer fully. It is this fact that adds rasa[g] to the stanza. "Vāñchā samadhikam" [more than what is desired]: in a previous stanza (4) the Ācārya had said that Amba's feet themselves would give the devotee more than what he wished for. And here he says "stotum vāñchan": before a man wishes to express his desire fully through his prayer, Ambā blesses him with sāyujya which is far more than what he desires (vāñchā samadhikam). And to say so is to create rasa. Here it is karuṇā rasa, the sentiment or mood of compassion. That the Ācārya has conveyed it with such ease, through verbal play, is poetic rasa, the aesthetic experience arising out of poetry.

We realise from this that, if a man is well versed in the śāstra of language and other subjects and is not vain about his learning and is mature in his devotion to Ambā, thinking himself to be her minion—our Ācārya was like that — he will not be indifferent even to people ordinarily considered unlearned or unwise and will discover in their speech truths of a profound nature. Ambā will confer these truths on him to be personally experienced by him. If she reveals such truths to an unlearned and uncultured man will she not do so to a noble person who is broad-minded enough to discern words of wisdom in the speech of uncultivated people? We have here a new commentary on one of the aphorisms of the *Kural*[g]: *"'Epporul yārār vāy ketpinum."* We must listen to ideas expressed by anyone, whoever it be, and if we discover a great truth in them it may show a way to our liberation. What the *Kural* refers to as *"arivu"* is knowledge based on experience.

Though Vaiṣṇavism does not speak of Nirguṇa Advaita nor accept it as part of the system, it has a concept according to which, an individual, on his becoming liberated, attains the state of Saguṇa Mahāviṣṇu with all the god's powers and attributes. But when it says so, it makes one modification of the liberated status as Saguṇa Mahāviṣṇu, and it is for the sake of propriety and in order not to offend against norms of good conduct: he will have all the qualities of Viṣṇu, all his godliness, except that of being the husband of Lakṣmī. Non-dualist Śaivism too says that on his liberation a man will become Parameśvara but he will not have the status of being the husband of Umā, that is Pārvatī. Vaiṣṇavas and others, unlike us Advaitins who on liberation have only one entity and that too without attributes, have to speak thus since they have, even in the state of liberation, divine couples like Narāyaṇa-Lakṣmī and Śiva-Śakti. When you say "except for one thing" [the reference is to a devotee becoming Viṣṇu or Śiva except for the fact that he does not have the status of the husband, as the case may be, of Lakṣmī or Pārvatī] you may develop doubts about the other attributes the devotee will acquire on his liberation. When one wonders whether for followers of these systems [other than Advaita] it is possible to achieve sāyujya with Viṣṇu or Śiva, without such exceptions, this stanza opens a way. "Do not practise meditation with the object of becoming directly Nārāyaṇa or Śiva. Instead, let the object of your meditation be becoming Lakṣmī or Ambā. Being Mothers, they may [in their motherly affection] bless you with such sāyujya. You will realise then that Ambā is united with Īśvara or, if you are a Vaiṣṇava, that Lakṣmī is united with Viṣṇu. When you are dissolved in Lakṣmī or Ambā will it not mean that you have obtained Viṣṇu-sāyujya or Śiva-sāyujya since Viṣṇu and Śiva are dissolved in Lakṣmī and Ambā respectively. It is only when a devotee obtains sāyujya in this manner that there will be no violation of the pātivratya[g] dharma since the wife of the god in question is not separate but dissolved in him. This idea, though not expressly stated in the stanza, is latent in it.

In becoming father, after being mother, there is first vātsalya bhāva; then mother becoming father means the manifestation of the highest aspect of devotion, that is nayikā bhāva. This is what takes a man to non-dualistic realisation, so have great men written from their own experience.

In an earlier stanza we saw that the celestial maidens imagine themselves to be one with Śiva since Ambā reveals all her beauty only to him. The idea behind it is the reverse of what is suggested in the present stanza.

The Ācārya has blessed us with a stanza in which he has "kneaded" together philosophical concepts like Advaita and Dvaita, learning and devotion, in which the devotee abases himself as a minion of the object of his devotion and in which he regards himself as a bride. He has given us a morsel to delight our aesthetic palate.

References

1 "Yam yamantamabhikāmo bhavati yam kāmam kāmayate so'sya saṅkalpādeva samuttisṭhati tena sampanno mahīyate."

— *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 8.2.10

2 In the *Toṭakāṣṭaka*.

Chapter 60

Three Āratis

The Ācārya who states that the lustre of the crowns of Mukunda (Viṣṇu), Brahmā, Indra and others serves the purpose of worshipping Ambā with the waving of lights (nīrājana or dīpārādhana) speaks seven or eight stanzas hence (30) of the individual Self (that is the devotee) becoming one with Parāśakti. And in this undifferentiated state of liberation [when he is inseparable from Paraśakti] the fire of the great deluge of universal destruction serves as nīrājana for him.

"Mahāsaṁvartāgnir-viracayati nīrājana-vidhim."

The words mean that the man (referred to above) becomes Ambā, that is the embodiment of Truth, transcending creation, time and so on. He is not merely "yah", not "anybody". He is not one who is merely devoted and learned. He belongs to a higher level [higher than what devotion and learning can make him], says the Ācārya. He refers to him as one who worships Ambā in a non-dualistic attitude. In the "Bhavāni tvam" śloka the idea of "I becoming you" (the devotee becoming Ambā herself) occurred in the natural course of composing the stanza, as part of the poet's view; the words did not reflect the intention of the man in question (yaḥ). Here, (Stanza 30), it is different. In this verse the "yaḥ" is defined: he is conscious of what he does or says and the idea that he is Ambā ("you are I") — [or "I am indeed you"]— is ever present in his mind. "Tvām aham iti sadā bhāvayati yaḥ," says the Ācārya. He worships not in the attitude of a minion of Ambā ("Daso'ham) but as one who identifies himself with her "so'ham". The Ācārya further observes that the fire of the great deluge becomes the ārati performed with the burning of camphor. What reduces everything to ashes becomes dīpārādhana for him, a means of adoring.

There are three nīrājanas mentioned in the *Saundaryalaharī*. The lustre emanating from the crowns worn by Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Indra and others falling on the feet of Ambā (as they place their heads at her feet) is one. The second: performed to the devotee whom Ambā has non-dualistically made one with her — and it means the ārati is to Ambā herself, Ambā, the Parabrahma-Śakti who does not perish even in the great deluge. This is the nīrājana performed by the great deluge. The third nīrājana is mentioned in the concluding stanza (100) of the hymn,

The three nīrājanas are for creation, sustenance and dissolution. However, they are not here in that order. First comes sustenance, followed by dissolution and creation. Ṣthiti is sustenance and protection carried out with compassion: this role is the most important for Ambā. In Praṇava (Om or Aum) syllables denoting creation, sustenance and dissolution come in the proper order -- *a, u* and *m*. But in what is called "Devīpraṇava" (the Praṇava of Ambā), which is "Umā", the syllable denoting sustenance *"u"* comes first, then comes *"m"*, denoting destruction, followed by *"a"* which denotes creation. The three nīrājanas referred to in the hymn are in this order. The nīrājana performed by Mukunda and others with their crowns relates to sustenance. They exist and since they keep sustaining us it means it refers to the period of sthiti or sustenance. There is an interesting point to note here: there is what is called internal evidence in the stanza (22) for sthiti being mentioned first. Usually we say Brahmā, Viṣṇu and so on. But here the god in charge of sthiti or sustenance, Viṣṇu, comes first as "Mukunda", then comes Brahmā. The one who destroys, Rudra, is not mentioned at all but instead Indra is mentioned.

The nīrājana performed by the great fire of deluge relates to saṁhara or dissolution. This is clearly known to everybody.

The nīrājana in the last śloka of the hymn (Stanza 100) relates to creation. The Ācārya says here that Ambā herself was instrumental in creating the poetical work and that it is with it (with the hymn itself) that he performs the nīrājana to her. Just as Ambā creates the world out of her inventive imagination, so too a poet creates poems, hymns, with his imagination. So the goddess herself is the original basis of what seems to be his composition. That original source of the Ācārya's work, Ambā, is the sun (sūrya-maṇḍala). And he shows his hymn to be the flame of a small lump of burning camphor before that effulgent sun.

Thus *Saundaryalaharī* with its three nīrājanas is a supremely auspicious offering. Here we see that the first nīrājana is the lustre of the crowns worn by Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Indra.

Chapter 61

Why Rudra is not Mentioned

Sleep, Death and Turīya Samādhi

It is customary to speak of the Trinity as Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra. And it is appropriate to do so in the context of the three functions (creation, sustenance and destruction) the gods perform. A question arises here: why did the Ācārya omit Rudra and mention Indra?

The intention of the Ācārya in doing so is not to show that Ambā is superior to the Trimurtī. This he has already done in the first two stanzas. The purpose here (Stanza 22) is to tell us that her feet are worshipped even by very great celestials. He has mentioned three important gods. Of them Viṣṇu, who sustains us all, is the king of all the worlds; the king of the celestial world is Indra; and Brahmā is approached by all celestials whenever they are in trouble. Indra is not only the king of the celestials, he is also the guardian of one of the eight cardinal points—east. If he is mentioned as a "dikpāla" [as a guardian of one of the cardinal points] it means the reference is to the sustenance of the world, that is the period of sthiti.

Being nīrājana for sthiti, the period of sustenance, the destroyer is not mentioned. I am stating one reason for Rudra's omission.

There is also another reason and it is conceptual. Sattva, rajas, tamas[g], and the state beyond the three, Nirguṇa: of these four creation or sṛṣṭi relates to rajas and Brahmā; sustenance or sthiti relates to sattva and Viṣṇu; and dissolution or samhāra relates to tamas and Rudra. Turīya relates to Nirguṇa and the Brahman. We find that for each function and guṇa there is a deity. The fourth state, turīya, is without any function: it is Nirguṇa, and as the word itself suggests, it has no guṇa. Creation, sustenance and dissolution correspond in a man's life to jāgrat (the waking state), svapna (dream) and suṣupti (sleep). A man has only one mind but in his imagination he dreams of many men, many places and many activities: this state of svapna is sṛṣṭi or creation. In his wakefulness, jāgratāvastha, he is engaged in worldly activities: this is sthiti or sustenance. When everything has become calm and subdued and asleep, it is suṣupti and it corresponds to dissolution. When a man is asleep there is in his inner being an entity, a rudimentary life force, that does not sleep and is not attached to anything: it is turīya. The word means "the fourth". It is beyond the three states of jāgrat, svapna and suṣupti; unwise and uncultivated people like us are not at all aware of it. In the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* it is referred to in language familiar to us as "caturthā". Jāgrat, svapna and suṣupti concern human life, the piṇḍa or microcosm, the tiny world of mortals. Creation, sustenance and dissolution belong to the macrocosm and they are the concern of Īśvara who conducts the big, big, world.

But turīya is common to both — it is the same turīya for both. That turīya which inheres Īśvara, the Saguṇa Brahman, as its basic truth and which exists as the functionless Nirguṇa Brahman, it is the same as the Ātman which is the basis of the three states [jāgrat, svapna and suṣupti].

Why do I tax you with all this metaphysics? It is to show that saṁhāra or dissolution is close to turīya, the state of the Brahman, though it may not appear to be so. A man cannot remain in wakefulness or dream in the same way as he is in the turīya samādhi, when his mind is subdued and he is serene. In suṣupti or dreamless sleep he is serene. But it is only in turīya samādhi that he experiences the serenity as real. In suṣupti there is no awareness and there is no joy of experiencing the tranquillity. So it is a fact that these two states of suṣupti and turīya samādhi are different. But considering the bustle and the gnawing the mind is subjected to in the state of wakefulness and dream, suṣupti is somewhat close to the experience of turīya. If we enlarge this truth on a cosmic scale, Rudra who performs the function of dissolution and gives peace to all creatures, albeit temporarily, is closer to the Parabrahman that means eternal peace than to Brahmā the Creator and Viṣṇu the Sustainer. It is this Parabrahman that the Śaiva and Śākta systems refer to as "Śivam". That is why Rudra himself has come to be called Śiva despite the difference between the two. Rudra is the destroyer, Maheśvara or Īśvara is the god of tirodhāna or veiling, Sadāśiva or Śiva is the god who blesses ("anugrahamūrti"), that is the one who grants final release. Above these aspects is Śivam, whom knowledgeable people regard as the Parabrahman without any function. However, ordinary people do not make any distinction between Rudra, Iśvara, Śiva and Śivam. But Brahmā and Viṣṇu are not identified with any other deities.

What is said of the Lord (Śiva) applies to Ambā also. Parāśakti who is the total Śakti of the Parabrahman is considered the wife of Rudra, that is Pārvatī. The goddess of our hymn, Kāmeśvarī, is also that total, primordial Śakti. Parāśaktī is not regarded as Sarasvatī or Lakśmī. In the *Saundaryalaharī,* she is addressed as "Himagirisute", "Tuhinagirisute", which are among Pārvatī's many names, but not as "Sarasvatī" or "Laksmī".

We must note that Rudra alone is similar to Śiva, not Brahmā or Viṣṇu. Here the Ācārya intends to mention the deities who, by making obeisance to Ambā, perform nīrājana to Ambā with the glitter of their crowns. But he thinks that it is not proper to include her husband among them: it would not be in keeping with the norms of worldly conduct [the husband falling at the feet of his wife]. In the latter part of the hymn in which he has composed stanzas full of poetic rasa he states that Paramaśiva fell at the feet of Parāśakti—and this after a loverś quarrel. But the Ācārya did not want to do the same in the earlier part in which greater importance is given to conceptual matters and tantra. In the very first stanza of the hymn he clearly mentions Ambā's greatness and Śiva's smallness [that he would be nothing unless united with her], that even to stir he has to be united with her. In the next stanza the Ācārya says that Śiva performs his function of destruction with a speck of dust sticking to her foot. It must be because he does not want to bring him again and again below her level that, when speaking of great celestials, great deities, paying obeisance to Ambā, he mentions Mukunda, Brahmā and Indra among them but not Śiva or Rudra who is akin to them.

Superficially seen, the Ācārya may appear to mention clearly something different from what I have said (Stanza 25), that Śiva too falls at the feet of Ambā. "It would be enough if we worship your feet with flowers and it would be tantamount to worshipping all the members of the Trinity. It is so because they keep their heads at your feet and on them their folded hands." Does it not mean that Śiva also prostrates himself at Ambā's feet like the other two of the Trinity? But if you examine the stanza carefully you will note that there is absolutely no room here to equate Śiva with Rudra, and that mention is made only of one of the members of the Trinity, Rudra, who is the destroyer. Also stated clearly is that the three deities making obeisance to her are born of her qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas: "Trayaṇām devānām triguṇa-janitānām tava Śive." The reference here is to Rudra born of tamas, among her three guṇas. If Śiva were born of her guṇa would it not mean that he is her child? Is it not just and proper for a child to prostrate itself before its mother? I said this to show that Parameśvara who is in the position of Ambā's husband does not prostrate himself at her feet. While expressing the idea that pūjā performed to Ambā includes worship offered to the Trimūrti, Rudra who is regarded as being equal or similar to Śiva cannot but be mentioned. While developing the idea that even great deities worship Ambā, the Ācārya has included the names of Mukunda, Brahmā and Indra but not the name of Śiva, or of Īśvara or of Rudra. These deities (Mukunda, Brahmā, Indra...) will vanish in the great deluge. The one—and the only one—who will remain then is not present here.

Chapter 62

Devotees Who are Advaitins Never Perish

Since I am reminded of it I shall speak about the same, the subject referred to in the stanza dealing with the fire of the great deluge that serves the purpose of a nīrājana. It is mentioned in the stanza that those who worship Ambā in the non-dualistic attitude of "tvām aham" ("You are I"[1]) receive the karpūrārati [ārati performed with the burning of camphor] in the form of the fire of the great deluge. It means these devotees do not perish even in the great deluge. But in a previous stanza (26) the Ācārya says that during the time of mahā-saṁhāra (the great dissolution) all perish, including Brahmā and Viṣṇu. But Parameśvara who keeps sporting with Ambā does not. Then how can he say that those who worship her in the "tvām aham" ("you are I") attitude are not destroyed?

He can. If these devotees were separate from Ambā they too would perish. However, have they not become non-dualistically one with her? Of course it is union that is Saguṇa, not Nirguṇa. There is no question of any worship with nīrājana to a Nirguṇa entity. "Svadehodbhūtābhir ghṛṇibhir aṇimādyābhirabhito," says stanza (30) about Ambā. It is confirmed that Ambā is in her Saguṇa state with the eight aiśvaryas emanating from her body as rays surrounding her. We must regard the "tvām aham" devotees in the same manner as we understand the "Bhavāni tvam" minions or dāsas of Ambā who have attained oneness with her. Whether it is in the Saguṇa or Nirguṇa manner, the fact is they have become one with her. However, if they are said to have been offered dīpārādhana as separate from her and referred to as "they" the reason is this. Although they have the non-dualistic attitude that they are themselves performing the sport of the drama of deluge, they will have, at the same time, entwined with it devotion and joy in the fact that "this lady (Ambā) is performing such a sport with such power". Nobody (no individual Self) will have the power of creation, sustenance and dissolution. That is attaining the non-dualistic union with the Saguṇa Brahman with all aiśvarya is not possible in practice. But to the devotee belonging to the highest plane, all that the Saguṇa Brahman does will seem as if done by himself and it will be a feeling that goes deep in him. He cannot, however, be so in reality. To make up for this deficiency he will have the joy of witnessing with devotion what she does. In the Saguṇa state this is the highest experience afforded by the Parabrahman. In truth, one wonders whether the Paramātman exists in the Saguṇa state to grant such an exalted experience to one in a hundred million.

With regard to those who are with Ambā in a dualistic as well as non-dualistic sense : it is for the purpose of their witnessing the sport of the deluge that she has retained them dualistically. This means that they are not themselves trapped in that sport. It is those who are trapped as actors in the cosmic drama who will be caught in the scene of the deluge and perish in it. Those who have resigned from being actors and remain outside as spectators of the drama, how can they be involved in what is happening in the scene of the drama?

People who have, in a sense, developed the non-dualistic attitude to Ambā in her Saguṇa aspect, and those who dualistically witness her drama — and only witness her drama but are not actors in it — these "tvām aham" devotees (those who regard Ambā as themselves) are beyond worldly affairs. When the Ācārya says that "Śiva alone will survive", it is in the sense that when all others ensnared in the cosmic drama perish, he alone escapes. So there is no contradiction between the statement that Śiva alone survives and that those who regard themselves as Ambā (the "tvām aham" devotees) receive the fire of the great deluge as nīrājana.

The one whom we commonly call Śiva is not caught in the cosmic drama when he is Kāmeśvara - Śiva and the Nirguṇa - Śivam. However, when he is Rudra, Maheśvara and Sadāśiva, carrying out the three cosmic functions, he too is caught in the cosmic drama. When the cosmos is destroyed, Rudra too perishes, even though he himself is its destroyer. If this does not happen, will it not mean that the destroyer Rudra will still remain without any function to perform even after the dissolution of the cosmos? If an office has been abolished, the officers, those who run it, become redundant and they have to go. When the cosmos itself ceases to exist those who perform the pañcakṛtya (the five functions) relating to it will have to leave. When there is no creation, when there is none to be sustained, to be destroyed, to be trapped in Māyā or to be freed from it, where is the place for the celestials from Brahmā to Sadāśiva? Respecting Ambā's saumāṅgalya[8] what will remain then are Kāmeśvara who is inseparable from her and the Nirguṇa Śivam who is the very basis of her being. There is no need to speak specially of the fact that Śivam is the eternal Truth. It cannot but exist at any time. Apart from Śivam the one who remains after the great deluge is the husband for name's sake of Parabrahma - Śakti, *i.e.* Kāmeśvara-Śiva. It is to sport with her together that he came into being. The Ācārya says (in Stanza 26): "Viharati Sati tvatpatirasau." [O Sati, that husband of yours sports himself.] That, later, the Ācārya has spoken of Ambā as "Parabrahmamahiṣī" is well known. Since it would not be appropriate to state that a Nirguṇa entity (one without attributes) sports together with Ambā or Parāśakti, we have to take it that the one who sports with her is Kāmeśvara-Śiva.

In the stanza in which the Ācārya speaks about devotees who regard themselves as Ambā ("tvām aham"), he says that they consider Śiva's aiśvarya to be no more than a blade of grass, thus elevating them to great heights and lowering the Lord (Śiva) all at once: "Trinayana-samṛddhim tṛṇayataḥ", so the Ācārya observes in a beautiful alliteration. The three-eyed Śiva's aiśvarya is no better than a blade of grass, "tṛṇayataḥ". Why does the Ācārya say so? Although Śiva has the exalted name of "Īśvara", has he any aiśvarya of his own? Is it not the sovereign queen Ambā who has made him Īśvara? It is the aiśvarya bestowed on him by her. It is "by her leave" [the Mahāguru adds with a smile] that he rules. However, those who worship her in the attitude of "you are I" and become one with her make her aiśvarya their own. Before that gāṁbhīrya, that profundity and majesty, Īśvara receives nothing. Also Ambā does not confer all her aiśvarya on him. There are many other "authorities" to share it. Only those who worship her as "tvām aham" and become one with her enjoy all her aiśvarya as their own. That is why it is said, "Trinayana-samṛddhim tṛṇayataḥ."

This idea is expressed to heighten the worship of Ambā, to give it a more sublime character, in the non-dualistic attitude. It should not be taken all too literally. After all, Ambā and Īśvara are not two separate entities. All that is hers is also his. She herself is his aiśvarya. "Aiśvaryam Indumauleḥ," says Mūka[2].

I spoke about the profundity implicit in the attitude of those who seek identity with Ambā, "Tvām aham". There is also humility in saying "You are I" instead of "I am you". One of the mahāvākyas is[g] "I am the Parabrahman" ("Aham Brahmāsmi"). Another says: "This Ātman." (what appears as the jīvātman), "indeed is the Brahman." The "tvām aham" mentioned here and the Vedic mahāvākyas are the same in purport. Those without a proper understanding of this purport and those who go by the order of the words in the mahāvakyas will misconstrue the statements as "the Brahman is the jīvātman". When you learn the mahāvākyas from a guru there will be no room for confusion about their meanings and you will know them clearly, "That the Brahman is you." Also there is the suggestion that "It is you who become I". There is at the same time the humble attitude that "without you I do not exist". Apart from the fact that the meaning of the sentence is conveyed clearly there is an attitude of humility in it. Besides, there is the profound feeling that the devotee has a right to Ambā's aiśvarya, all of it. It is to enthuse the devotee that the Ācārya states that Īśvara's aiśvarya is not worth more than a blade of grass for him (the devotee).

To sum up, the truth we must learn is this: the devotee (the individual Self) who has the attitude of oneness with Ambā as well as Īśvara who is ever inseparably united with her are both imperishable.

References

[1] Strictly speaking, "you are I" must be "tvam aham". But the words "tvām aham" occur in the second line of Stanza 30: "Niṣevye nitye tvām aham iti sadā bhāvayati yaḥ." ("You who are worthy of worship, whoever regards you always as himself —as "I"...) "You are I" is not a grammatically correct translation but the words convey the idea of the devotee regarding Ambā as himself.

[1] Aiśvaryamindumauleraikātmyaprakṛti kāñcimadhyagatam
Aindavakiśoraśekharamaidamparyam cakāsti nigamānām
— *Mūka-Pañcaśati*, 1.7

Chapter 63

The Glory of Ambā's Chastity

In one stanza (26), the Ācārya refers to the mahā-saṁhāra, the great dissolution. At the time, while Śiva remains sporting with Ambā, all other deities, celestials, perish. The Ācārya names them one by one.

Brahmā perishes in the great deluge, he says: "Viriñciḥ pañcatvam vrajati." Viṣṇu comes to a full stop: "Harirāpnoti viratim." He who destroys all, Yama, is himself destroyed: "Vināśam Kīnāśo bhajati." "Kīnāśa" is a name of Yama. The one who has in his possession more riches than anybody else is not saved by all his wealth; he too dies: "Dhanado yāti nidhanam." "Dhanada" is Kubera. "Nidhanam" means end, death. Just as Ambā sports herself during the great deluge, the Ācārya indulges in word play: "Dhanada-nidhanam"; "vināśaṁ-Kīnāśa". "Vitandrī māhendrī vitatirapi sammīlita-dṛśā." No Indra survives : it is not one Indra but an army of Indras close their eyes; they sleep and it is the sleep from which they never awake. The celestials who never close their eyes now have them closed. From the time of creation until the deluge there are many manvantaras and for each manvantara there is a new Indra. That is why the reference to an army of Indras, "Māhendrī vitatiḥ".

"Even during this great deluge, your husband sports with you — [all other deities perish] — "mahāsamhāre asmin viharati Sati tvatpatiḥ asau."

The Ācārya refers to Ambā here as "Satī" and the word is used meaningfully. "Satī" means a lady of supreme chastity, a great pativratā. Satī immolated herself in the fire of the sacrifice performed by Dakṣa when she saw that her husband was not respected at the place and she thought that to continue to live in such a place was sinful. Although she appeared to have perished at the time, she is imperishable, eternal. How can Brahmaśakti be otherwise? She who is eternal is Satī, pativratā. So her husband also can have no end; he must also be eternal. If it were otherwise this great pativratā would commit ''sati" by jumping into the fire of the great deluge. So it is in keeping with this Satī's eternal saumāṅgalya[8] that her husband also is saved from the great deluge.

A similar view is expressed in another stanza (28): in it the Ācārya refers to Ambā's "tāṭaṅka mahimā", the greatness of her ear-ornaments "tava janani tāṭaṅka-mahimā".

Sudhāmapyāsvādya pratibhaya-jarāmṛtyuhariṇīm
Vipadyante viśve vidhiśatamakhādyā diviṣadaḥ
Karālam yat kṣvelaṁ kabalitavataḥ kālakalanā
Na Śambhostanmūlam tava janani tāṭaṅka-mahimā.

If one swallows poison, especially such a terrible poison as Kālakūṭa, one dies at once. It is our belief that those who have taken amṛta live for ever. But here the story is the reverse. During the time of cosmic dissolution, the celestials who have taken amṛta perish but Parameśvara alone survives, Parameśvara who has swallowed the dreadful poison called Kālakuṭa or Hālāhala.

Chapter 64

Ambā's Sport — and Īśvara and other Deities

An interesting fact here is that there is Parameśvara by himself on one side and all other deities together on the other. The same is the case with regard to the worship of Ambā. When you say Mukunda, Brahmā and Indra, it means all the rest of the gods also [that is apart from Śiva]. All of them worship Ambā placing their crowned heads at her feet. But Īśvara alone remains as one who does not worship her. He, the mendicant with matted hair, does not join all those gods wearing crowns. How does Ambā treat those who worship her and the one who does not? It is really strange: the former perish in the deluge while the latter alone remains and remains watching her sport and sporting himself with her.

I must refer to the stanza (29) in which it is said that Ambā rushes to worship the one who does not worship her, tripping upon the crowns of those who adore her. The most eminent of the celestials prostrate themselves before her, wearing their crowns. At that moment Īśvara happens to return to the scene after a visit to some place. Seeing him from a distance, Ambā is overwhelmed by her wifely devotion and love. Intending to receive him, she rises from her seat and runs up to him. Then her companions warn her to be careful not to trip on the crowns. Without referring to the context in which this incident occurs, the Ācārya begins the stanza with the cautioning words of Ambā's companions, thereby imparting a dramatic air to his narration.

"Kirīṭam vairiñcam parihara": "Keep away from the crown of Brahmā."

"Vairiñcam" means that belonging to Brahmā. Among the many names of Brahmā the Ācārya has used "Viriñci" more often than others. In the very first stanza occurs "Hari-Hara-Viriñcādi". In the next stanza we see "Viriñciḥ samcinvan". While referring to the group of poets (who are unable to describe Ambā's beauty) he uses the words "Viriñci-prabhṛtayaḥ" (Stanza 12). "Viśeṣena riñcatīti Viriñciḥ" is the definition of the word. "Riñjati" means creates. Since Brahmā performs his function with the distinction that is characteristic of him (viśeṣena) he is "Viriñci". Because there is viśeṣa in the name, the Ācārya too has given it a place of viśeṣa.

"Mother, as you walk, keep away from the crown of Viriñci."

Then Ambā's companions again caution her: "Kaiṭabhabhidaḥ kaṭhore koṭīre skhalasi." "You are about to trip on the hard crown of the one (Viṣṇu) who split the demon Kaiṭabha. Be careful."

When Viṣṇu was sleeping, Madhu and Kaiṭabha appeared on the scene to attack Brahmā who was residing in the lotus stemming from the navel of Viṣṇu. Brahmā could not himself awaken his father, that is Viṣṇu. He thrust him into yogic sleep (yoganidrā) and prayed to Ambā in the form of Yoganidrā [in one of her aspects]. He adored her with the idea of awakening Viṣṇu with her blessing. She too, listening to his prayer, removed the nidrāśakti that had assailed... No.. if I speak thus I wonder whether devotees of Viṣṇu will be angered. So I will correct myself and say that she removed the nidrāśakti that had been dependent on Viṣṇu who, on waking up, slew Madhu and Kaiṭabha. In our stanza, since the Ācārya happens to mention the name of Viṣṇu, immediately after that of Brahmā, he alludes to the story of Madhu and Kaiṭabha in order to connect the names of Brahmā and Viṣṇu with that of Ambā. It is the name "Kaiṭabhabhid" for Viṣṇu that serves the purpose of the allusion.

The Ācārya says that Viṣṇu's crown is "kaṭhora", that it is hard — "kaṭhore koṭire". "Koṭira" means the same as "kirīṭa", crown. In the *Sahasranāmam* occurs the term "Kuruvinda-maṇi-śreṇī-kanatkoṭīra-maṇḍitā" : Ambā wears a glittering jewel-encrusted crown. A crown that is "kaṭhora" is a solid crown. Why solid crown? An answer to the question is to be found in the Ācārya's *Viṣṇupādādikeśānta-stotra* in which occurs this, "kṛtamakuṭa-mahādeva-liṅga-pratiṣṭhe". Viṣṇu wears a crown shaped like a Śivaliṅga. A Śivaliṅga will not be fragile but solid. An interesting point is that without giving a thought as to whether it would be sacrilegious to do so, he places his crowned head at Ambā's feet. Ambā too is moved by his (Viṣṇu's) great devotion to her husband and as she goes to receive him she is about to stumble on the crown.

When there is devotion and love welling up nothing will be a sacrilege. Kaṇṇappa marked with his shod foot the eye of the Śivaliṅga he had scooped out (to fix his own eye there).

In keeping with the earlier statement about Mukunda, Brahmā and Indra performing nīrājana to Ambā's feet with their crowns, here too the Ācārya brings in the name of Indra after those of Brahmā and Viṣṇu: "Jahi Jaṁbhāri makuṭam." Since Indra killed a demon called Jambha he came to have the name of "Jaṁbhāri". "Keep away from Indra's crown. Don't trip on it," Amba's companions warn her thus. The Ācārya who sings the praises of Ambā, as if keeping her directly in front of him, says: "Tava parijanoktir vijayate." "The words of your companions, attendants, resound wonderfully."

It is with a dramatic flourish that the Ācārya mentions first the cautioning by the attendants of Ambā. It is only as he concludes the stanza that he mentions who does the cautioning, Ambā's companions, attendants. In between he mentions the context which of course is what is important. "Praṇamreṣu": as the great celestials (mentioned in the verse) are prostrating themselves before the goddess. Is the context the time of their making obeisance? No. "Context" means a specific point of time, a particular occasion. The celestials keep prostrating themselves before Ambā all the time: "Śaśvanmukulita-karottamsa-makuṭāḥ," so says another stanza (25). Then what is the context here? "Prasabham upayātasya bhavanam Bhavasyābhyutthāne" : "when Śiva, that is Bhava, returns to your home or bhavana." "Upayātam" means return. Ambā's act of rising from her seat to receive Parameśvara is expressed by the Ācārya with the word "abhyutthānam".

You must have heard the words "abhyutthānam adharmasya:" they are spoken by the Lord in the Gītā (4. 7):

Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati Bhārata
Abhyutthānam adharmasya tadā'tmānam sṛjāmyaham

"Whenever dharma declines and whenever there is abhyutthānam of adharma, then do I create myself as an avatara," says the Lord. Here "abhyutthānam" is customarily understood as "rising" based on the connotation of "getting up". In the *Saundaryalaharī* the word has the meaning of "rising and meeting to receive". Can we apply this meaning to the Gītā verse (quoted above)? Can we construe that it is adharma that makes the Lord become an avatāra on earth? And does it (adharma) go half way to receive the avatāra? [The Great Master laughs..] Rāvaṇa, Kaṁsa, Hiraṇyakaśipu: was it not their adharma that made the Lord descend to earth, dragged him down here? So if all of us commit a great adharma... [The Gurudeva laughs again...] But what fate awaited them, those who practised adharma, from the hands of the avatāras? That should not be forgotten...

The Ācārya refers to the excitement caused by the return home of Īśvara as ''prasabham'': it means flurry of movement. It was during this time, when Ambā rises from her seat and rushes to receive her husband, that her attendants warn her not to trip over the crowns of the celestials.

All those who worship at her feet are made to perish by Ambā in the great deluge, but there is one on seeing whom she rushes, wanting to fall at his feet, and he is saved by her, he alone in fact.

Is it right on the part of Ambā to let down those who fall at her feet? But do they in fact perish in the great deluge? Only their bodies are destroyed. Their life? It mingles with Ambā's and becomes one with it. What more is there, what more is to be expected? Having regard to the requirements of poetry and the poet's genius, it is said that all perish but that Īśvara alone remains because of Ambā's pātivratya and saumāṅgalya.

It is because of her pātivratya and saumāṅgalya that, when the bodies of all other deities perish, nothing happens to Īśvara even physically: his body too is eternal. His life and Ambā's life are one. Even when they seem to be separate, the life individually of the two becomes one great single life. Outwardly, as two embodied entities, they are husband and wife, and even in this aspect of Īśvara no injury is done to his body during the time of the universal destruction.

Chapter 65

The Sport of Protection and Punishment

It was not during the time of universal dissolution alone that there was danger to the lives of the celestials; during the churning of the ocean for amṛta too they felt threatened. Before the ambrosia came up the terrible poison called Kālakūṭa emerged spreading fire and threatening to burn everything in its flames. The celestials had not invited Īśvara to partake of the nectar that was to arise eventually. But now that their lives were endangered they rushed to him, crying for help. Īśvara did not ask them: "Ah, you knew the way to my place only now?" Out of his great compassion he made that Kālakūṭa poison into a ball and swallowed it at one gulp as an act of sacrifice.

The śāstras have it that one who is a true "prabhu", "yajamāna" or "lord" has two functions to perform: protection and punishment. He has to protect those who are under him and punish them when they commit a wrong. The same can be applied to a government. Hospitals, schools, the P.W.D.—these are part of the system to afford protection and sustenance to people. Similarly, more important than these, are the law-courts and the police department to administer justice and award punishment to offenders.

The Śiva-Ambā pair conduct their sport of protection and punishment in an interesting manner and it takes many different forms.

During the sacrifice conducted by Dakṣa, Śiva punished the celestials since they had watched with indifference Ambā giving up her body [in the sacrificial fire]. The goddess who sacrificed herself later became the cause of saving these very celestials in her new avatāra of Himavān's daughter. Śiva begot a son by her who became the commander of the celestial forces and saved them, the devas, by slaying the demon who had threatened their very existence. The celestials had a role in the story of his birth in that they created the circumstances leading to the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī.

When Yama cast his noose round Mārkaṇḍeya along with the Śivaliṅga he was clasping, Ambā the pativratā, her wrath aroused, burst out: "What, the noose of Yama has become the noose for my Svāmī?" And it was indeed she who punished the god of death. This is referred to in the account of how Śiva kicked Yama with his left foot. This is the story of Kāla, that is Yama. As for the story of Kāma, he was reduced to ashes by the fire from the eye in Śiva's forehead. Half of that eye belongs to Ambā who is the left side of Śiva. So in meting out punishment to Kāma she had half a share. But later, all by herself, without any part played by Śiva, she saved Kāma, giving him new life. She also imparted to him the power to achieve victory over Svāmī, that is Īśvara. She has in a veiled manner even punished Śiva. A work called *Kāmākṣī Vilāsam* mentions this. Here, in the *Saundaryalaharī* stanza which speaks of the greatness of Ambā's tāṭaṅka, a wonderful example is given of the protection afforded by a prabhu: it is that of Śiva saving the celestials by swallowing the Kālakūṭa poison. We are also reminded of the fact that Śiva was at the time saved by Ambā herself.

The purāṇic story is that Ambā gently holds Śiva by his throat and prevents the poison from going into his stomach. Does this mean that the Kālakūṭa poison will not do any harm if it remains in the throat and does not go further down the body? Is not its very smell lethal?

Chapter 66

Ambā: The Medicine that Gives Life to Īśa

The truth behind the purāṇic story [referred to in the previous chapter] is to be found in the Vedas themselves. There is a medicine called Śivā. It is a universal remedy ''viśva bheṣajī''. It is a medicine not only for all afflictions of mankind, it is a remedy for that affliction which is the cause of all afflictions, "bhavaroga'' or the disease called birth. Is that all? It is indeed a medicine for Śiva himself. "Rudrasya bheṣajī,'' so proclaims the Vedas. We chant this "Śrī Rudra mantra''[1] every day, performing abhiṣeka[g] to Rudra.

"O Parameśvara, if you continue to live even after swallowing the Kālakūṭa poison, who administered you the medicine for it [the antidote]? Don't think I do not know that secret. I am going to proclaim it to everyone as a mantra," so Mother Veda (Vedamātā) seems to say with a dramatic, poetic, air in the "Śrī Rudra Praśna". What is that secret? How is it proclaimed by Mother Veda as if speaking to the Lord himself?

"O Lord, you possess two bodies. Now you are seen in the body of Rudra. When we say 'Raudrākāram' [raudra or terrible in appearance] the world trembles. You appear in such a body as would make the world tremble. I have 'advertised' it as 'ghora' [terrible] or 'ghorataram' [more terrible than what is usually considered terrible][2]. Yet one like you has the utterly auspicious name of Śiva. It is so because you have another physique that is auspicious to the highest degree."

[The Gurudeva who was speaking the words of Vedamātā now says in his own words.]

What is present in the dualistic world, whether called good or bad, is the form of Īśvara. In our religion there is no distinction made between the two: God for the good and Satan for the bad or evil. It is the same

Īśvara that appears as Saṁhāra-Rudra (Rudra the destroyer) and as Śiva, the serene one, unequalled in giving his blessings.

We make a distinction between a "ghora mūrti" (a god of terrible aspect) and a beautiful mūrti. "Ghora" implies not only wrathfulness but suffering and all other evils; and by beautiful we understand all that is good, including serenity, love and happiness. From our experience of life we feel there is more bad or evil than good in the world.. That is why great men called worldly existence "ghora saṁsāra". But it is not all ghora because here and there and now and then we see in it the silver lining of tranquillity, happiness and beauty. Like medicine for disease there is relief given by Śiva for what is ghora. That life is a mixture of good and bad is the resolve of the Paramātman. We may take it that the bad element predominates because only then will we endeavour to be freed from the world and reach the state beyond good and evil and realise the Ātman. We cannot say with certainty that "this" or "that" is the purpose of creation. That is why I used the words, "we may take it". Though evil predominates, the will of the Paramātman is not to make the world altogether bad. When we say "miśra" (mixture) how can it be altogether bad? Like medicine for an ailment there is Śivā as a remedy for the terrible world. A disease is not totally cured; if it were so the world would be altogether good. By feeding a man once, his hunger is not banished for all time. You are hungry and when you are fed your hunger is appeased for the time being. When you feel hungry again you have to eat again. Similarly, for a terrible disease Śivam administers a medicine... What is that medicine? The Vedas call it "Śivā".

"Lord, do you know the medicine that has transformed your terrible body into an auspicious (Śiva) one? Make the second syllable of the name 'Śiva' long, and you get 'Śivā' and that is the medicine. The Paramātman is the root of all bodies and in It there is the element of motherliness, love that is utterly auspicious. It is that Śivā, the medicine that has pacified what is terrible about you and made you Śiva," so says the Śruti (that is the Vedas).

The Vedas do not stop with saying that Ambā is the medicine for the suffering of all of us caught in this world. They do not stop with saying that she is "viśvasya bheṣajī" ("medicine for the world"). She sees to it that the raudra rasa (the terrible mood) does not preponderate in the

Primordial Entity that conducts the cosmic drama; she appeases It with "karuṇā rasa" (the mood of compassion). So do the Vedas state.

When we understand the meaning of "Śivā" as the wife of Śiva, the implication is that Śiva is by nature auspicious and that Śivā is a name she acquired by virtue of her being Śiva's wife, that is without our inquiring into her own nature or qualities. But the Vedas have a different story to tell. They have it that it is by the medicine of Śivā administered to him that Rudra becomes Śiva. That Rudra has an auspicious physique is denoted by the term "Śivā-tanu", that is by using the feminine form of the term and not the masculine form, "Śiva tanu". That means the tanu or body of Śiva was caused by the motherly disposition (motherliness) of Śivā. The body is in the form of the father but the disposition, the inner character, is that of the mother. We call a medicinal herb "mūlikā" in the feminine gender. By taking it a woman can give birth to a male child also, cannot she? It is similar to that, to say that Rudra's body was transformed into that of Śiva by the "Śivā medicine" and that that transformed body is "Śivā-tanu". "Bheṣajī" is also in the feminine gender. Instead of using the word in the neuter gender as "bheṣajam", the feminine form is used here to bring in the motherly mind or attitude.

After the physique of Śiva assumed the masculine form, half of his body became Ambā in physical form also, so as to manifest both Mother and Father in one body.

Śivā first came as a medicine for Śiva's natural wrathfulness. Compassion or karuṇā welled up in him because of it and he swallowed the Kālakūṭa poison to save the celestials. Now by becoming mingled with him as a medicine, Ambā (or Śivā) saved him from disease or injury likely to be caused by that poison that came from outside.

It would be enough for people to be blessed with the sidelong glance of Ambā; they will not meet with an untimely death. That being so how can any poison cause injury to the Lord when Ambā resides in him, pouring out her compassion and occupying half his body? How can the deluge, ordinary or great, be a threat to his life? According to the Ācārya, there is no "kālakalanā" (counting of years) for Iśvara. He is not bound by time; nor has he any end in time. He is "Kālakāla" [the Death of time or of Death] and for that reason known as "Mṛtyuñjaya". We chant the Mṛtyuñjaya mantra for health and long life. The one who has triumphed over death, how can he ever die? She who accomplished his victory over death with her left foot makes him immortal by being with him.

It was to make people aware that Śiva was saved from the poison because of his being inseparably united with Ambā that she stopped the venom from going further down from the throat. The fact is even if the poison had gone into his stomach it could not have affected him since he was protected by her. But it was because people should know the importance of wifely loyalty, the greatness of Ambā, her love for her husband, that she stopped the poison in his throat for all to see.

"The fire emanating from the (Kālakūṭa) poison must have blazed all round, striking terror into the hearts of the celestials. How could you remain gazing at such a fire and not keep your eyes closed? Not only did you keep looking at the fire, you made the poison emitting the flames into a ball. What was it for you, a rose apple? Not only did you look at the fiery poison and roll it into a ball with your hand...What was so blue and like a corrugating rose apple you swallowed at one gulp? Was that rose apple one of those amazing pills prepared by siddhas? 'Keep it under your tongue. You can fly in space,' siddhas give you pills and tell you what [the miracles] they can accomplish. Did the Kālakūṭa poison seem to you like one of those pills? Even to look at it is to burn your eyes but still you put it in your mouth..." I am quoting from *Śivānadalaharī*. While mentioning the "siddha pill" the Ācārya must have been reminded of the pills prescribed in the siddha system of medicine. Also he must have been reminded of the "Śivābheṣajī" of the "Rudra" hymn and he must have addressed thus Śiva, connecting the two. Along with it we come to have a beautiful reason for Ambā having stopped the poison in Śiva's throat. "You saw (the poison), you took it and you put it into your mouth. Did you stop with that... What you put into your mouth you brought further down into your throat. Tell me, did you do so because of your desire to have an ornament for your throat with a blue jewel in it?" the Ācārya asks thus: "Vada" ("tell me"), he says to the Lord concluding the verse.

The Lord has no desire of any kind. So he would not have longed for anything to wear as an ornament. But Ambā perhaps may have wished to adorn her husband's white-complexioned throat with a blue stone. She could have by her mere wish or resolve or by the mere touch of her hand removed any trace of the poison swallowed by Īśvara but, instead of doing so, she made it shine like a sapphīre on her husband's neck which is beautiful like a conch-shell. Ambā is eternal, a pativratā also, and an everlasting sumaṅgalī. So she has made Parameśvara also eternal; he cannot be destroyed in any deluge. If Ambā is eternal she must be superior to the amṛta taken by the celestials, the ambrosia brought up during the churning of the ocean. The reason is that even those who had taken it could not escape the great dissolution. After all, Ambā's world is surrounded by an ocean of nectar—the amṛta in it is more plentiful than water. She must have been made of something superior to, higher than, amṛta.

That something is cit, consciousness, caitanya, the very essence of life. The amṛta from the ocean of milk cannot save one during the deluge; true amṛta is that which protects one eternally. That is why Ambā is called "Amṛta-caitanya-mūrti". Even the amṛta got from the ocean of milk is superior to all medicines — it is customary to say so. It is called (in Tamiḷ) *"mūvā marundu":* it prevents ageing. The present stanza contains the phrase, "jarā-mṛtyu-hariṇī"; "jara" is old age. What is the use of living long, undergoing suffering and without being able to hear, or to walk? Death is better than such a life. That is why *mūva marundu.* Amṛta itself prevents old age and death and (as said before) it is superior to all other medicines known to us. What, then, about "amṛta-caitanya"? It must surely be superior to the other amṛta. Ambā is that amṛta-caitanya personified, the embodiment of a sovereign universal remedy, "viśva bheṣajī". When she is in the left-hand side of the Lord how can he ever perish?

We often speak of ''*tāli bhāgyam*''[g]. When a man survives a serious accident or comes through a dread disease we speak of his wife's *tāli bhāgyam.* It is because of the *tāli bhāgyam* of Ambā that Īśvara escaped the great deluge and remained unhurt even after swallowing the Kālakūṭa poison.

References

1 Anuvāka 10, mantra 2.
2 ''Aghorebhyo' tha ghorebhyo ghoraghoratarebhyaḥ
Sarvataḥ śarva sarvebhyo namaste astu rudrarupebhyaḥ"
— *Mahā-Nārāyaṇopaniṣad*, 19.

Chapter 67

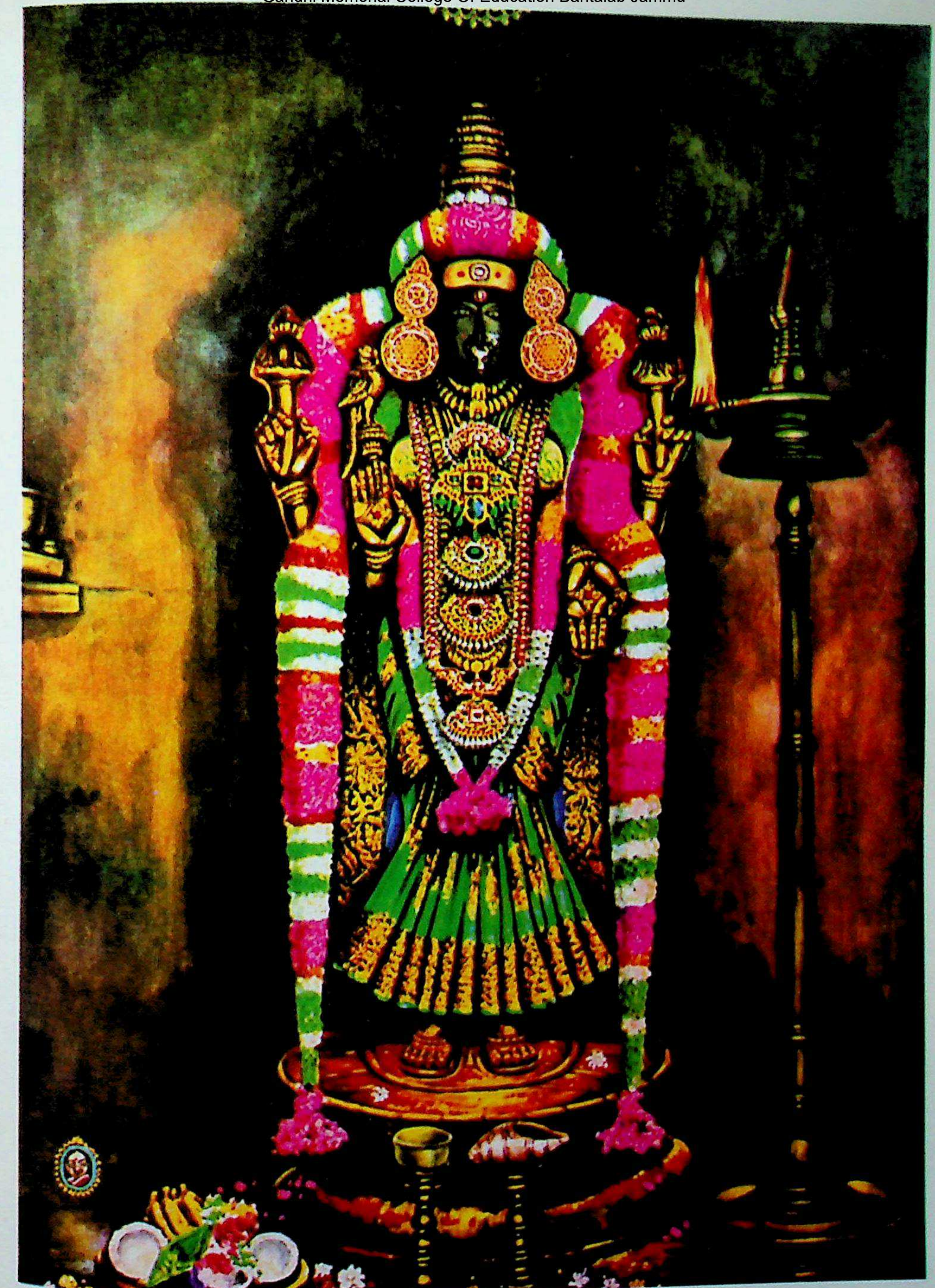
Ambā's Tāṭaṅka

This *"tāli bhāgyam"*[g] is also called Ambā's "tāṭaṅka mahimā", *i.e.* the greatness, the glory, of her tāṭaṅkas [ear-ornaments], says the Ācārya.

If the Vedas are called Śruti, the dharmaśāstras that the seers have composed and the Gītā that Kṛṣṇa Paramātman has taught come under Smṛti. The teachings of the Ācārya may also be included in Smṛti. The Vedic utterance, that Ambā is medicine to the Lord, is given here by the Ācārya as a Smṛti statement. Instead of literally copying the Vedic utterance, which would not be satisfying to our aesthetic sense, he says here, incorporating a novel poetic fancy, that it is the symbol of Ambā's saumāṅgalya, her tāṭaṅka, that protects her husband.

Interestingly enough, this tāṭaṅka is also a *tāli.* I am not putting forth a riddle, nor saying anything new. I am repeating what Kālidāsa has said in one of his poems. "Tālī-palāśa-tāṭaṅkam" : these are the words used by the poet[1]. "Tāla" or "tālī" means the palm-tree. "Palāśa" is the flame of the forest. But it also means a leaf, any leaf. "Tālīpalāśa" means palm-leaf. In olden times when people lived a simple unostentatious life, the pendant of a woman's maṅgalasūtra[g] and her ear-ornaments were made of the palm-leaf, both adornments denoting auspiciousness. That is how the bit of palm-leaf used as the pendant of the maṅgalasūtra came to be called *"tāli"* [in the South]. [The Tamil name] *toḍu* itself denotes a palm-leaf. It was the same palm-leaf that was used for ear-ornaments. I have seen peasant women, even today, wearing such palm-leaf ear-ornaments. Until in later times when life became ostentatious, all women, including those belonging to the Brahmin community, wore the palm-leaf ear-ornaments. Why, according to Kālidāsa, Parāśakti herself wears the same. That is why in later times the expensive diamond ear-studs women started wearing were still called *"vaira olai"* [*Vaira* or *vairam* is diamond and *olai* is palm-leaf].

The ear-ornament is also called *"kammal"* (in Tamiḷ). The word is derived from "kamala" or *kamal* (lotus). It is made of a stone set in the



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centre and six stones surrounding it, like a lotus with a karṇikā (pericarp) in the centre and the petals round it. A high-quality diamond is called [in Tamiḷ] *"nalla uṭāni kamalam"*.

Even in these days of ostentation and vanity, during the pūjā performed to Ambā we give sumaṅgalīs small black beads known as *karukumaṇi* and green palm-leaf that the goddess wears.

That *tāli* is derived from tāla (palm) is clear enough. The word "tāṭaṅka", ear-ornament, is also derived from it. "Tāḍa" is another form of the word "tāla". "Aṅka" means a mark. So *tāṭaṅka* is an auspicious mark made of tāḍa. This ornament is also called "tāḍapatra"; it means the same as "tālīpalāśa". "Tāḍaṅka" later became "tāṭaṅka". It seems tāṭaṅka is made up of an ear-stud and an ear-ring.

Tāli and the ear-ornament are important in denoting saumāṅgalya. When a woman ceases to be a sumañgalī [that is on her husband's death] she is divested of her *tāli* and ear-ornaments. A man's long life, his surviving a threat to his life, is attributed to his wife's *tāli-bhāgyam*. In the same way we can, with equal reason, use the term "tāṭaṅka bhāgyam": that is what the Ācārya calls "tāṭaṅka mahimā". "All the celestials who shared amṛta perished. But your husband who swallowed the entire poison (without it being shared by others) is not destroyed. It is due to the greatness of your tāṭaṅka, Mother," says the Ācārya ("Tava janani tāṭaṅka-mahimā.")

The ear has a special importance among the five sense-organs. It is the ear that grasps the sounds originating in space which has a high place among the pañcabhūtas (five elements). Is it not because all the Vedas were grasped by the ear that they are called "Śruti"? It is the ear that receives all teaching, all instruction. Although Ambā is a guru herself she learned all the Āgamas and mantras at the feet of Īśvara, her husband as well as her guru — and she learned by listening. Above all, is it not with her ears that she listens to all our prayers, all the songs we sing in her praise?

This may be the reason why our Ācārya is particularly devoted and attached to Ambā's tāṭaṅka. She is called "Sarvamaṅgalā" and the tāṭaṅka is her auspicious mark. In the *Sahasranāmam* it is stated that the sun and the moon are her two tāṭaṅkas: "Tāṭaṅka-yugali-bhūtatapanoḍupa-maṇḍalā". The Ācārya states in the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 34) that the same sun and moon are our Mother's two breasts that give us milk. The tāṭaṅkas are thus a sign of the saumāṅgalya[g] of Parameśvara's wife as well as a mark of the affection of our Mother who suckles us, her children. The power of the deity, Akhilāṇḍeśvarī, in Jaṁbukeśvaram, became too fierce to be borne by people. In order to appease the goddess, the Ācārya made Śrīcakras (two of them) in the form of tāṭaṅkas, drew the excess power of the deity into them and fixed them to her ears. Kāñcīpuram is a pṛthivī kṣetra[2] and is the centre of the earth. Here too the power of Kāmākṣī, the deity, became immeasurably great and unbearable. The Ācārya installed the Śrīcakra in the space in front of her to appease her. This was towards the end of his life. Jaṁbukeśvaram is an ap-kṣetra[3], but can the Śrīcakra for that reason be installed in the Kāverī? [The Kāverī flows past the temple of Jaṁbukeśvaram.] Not only in the water, the Śrīcakra cannot be installed in tejas, vayu and ākāśa[4] also. Since it is possible to install it only in the earth the Ācārya did so in Kañci. What did he do in Jaṁbukeśvaram? He thought that Ambā's auspicious Śiva-consciousness should swell over the Kāverī and also that her breast milk should flow in abundance out of her motherly affection for all of us, her children. The tāṭaṅka is a common mark or symbol of both and he had the Śrīcakra absorbed in it and fixed the same in the ear of the goddess Akhilāṇḍeśvarī — thus the act satisfying the purpose of a yantra as well as of an ornament. Just as the *Saundaryalaharī* is both a tantra śāstra and a work of poetry that proclaims the beauty of Ambā, so the tāṭaṅkas serve two purposes: they protect people according to the canonical texts and at the same time are adornments for Ambā. In fact the tāṭaṅka "beautifies the beauty of Ambā".

There are said to be Śrīcakra and Śivacakra tāṭaṅkas. Of the nine āvaraṇas in the Śrīcakra four belong to Śiva (Śivacakras) and five to Ambā. This is mentioned in an earlier stanza (11) of our hymn: "Caturbhiḥ Śrīkaṇṭhaiḥ Śivayuvatibhiḥ pañcabhirapi." Here Śiva is referred to as "Śrīkaṇṭha" and Ambā as "Śivayuvatī" and this is in keeping with the theme of the greatness of the tāṭaṅka. Śrīkaṇṭha is Nīlakaṇṭha. Poison is also known as "Śrī"; hence Nīlakaṇṭha becomes Śrīkaṇṭha. In the stanza dealing with the tāṭaṅka, the Ācārya speaks of the wonderful phenomenon of one who has swallowed poison remaining imperishable. That Ambā has an appellation in which her husband's name occurs — Śivayuvatī — shows her saumāṅgalya and also the fact that she is not fierce [this is denoted by the "Śiva" in the name] and that she is disposed to grant her blessings.

The Vedas refer to her as "Rudrasya bheṣajī". During the Ācārya's time her power had become unbearable to people. Actually, one must say that the power had not increased but that in the age of Kali people had become too weak to withstand the full impact of the vital power of the idols installed. When we are weak in body and are unable to digest healthy and nutritious food we find that gruel suits us better. Ambā's power to bless itself had to be diluted for the world to bear it. It was then that the Ācārya drew the extra power of Ambā into the Śrīcakra-tāṭaṅka and made it an ornament for her.

In the story told in the stanza of Śiva swallowing the poison, Ambā is mentioned as having made the deadly poison an ornament for his throat, the throat of one who was the root from which the Ācārya had sprung. As for the Ācārya himself, he made Ambā's fierce power—or what seemed her fierce power to people in their weakened state—an ornament.

If the mark or sign of "something", any entity, is not regarded merely as a symbol but etched deeply in the mind — particularly in the minds of great men, of seers and so on — that mark goes to strengthen that original "something". If harm is done to that mark, harm will be done to what it represents. It is so because the mark or sign itself acquires a vital power. Upavīta or the sacred thread is a mark of Brāhmaṇya: if it is worn Brāhmaṇya increases and if it gets cut or if it is lost we feel as if we have acquired some impurity and that Gāyatrī itself will be dimmed. The same is the case with the signs cherished by the great seers or by the common people. The national flag is a symbol. If any disrespect is shown it we feel disturbed. If it gets severed from the mast we feel there is truly danger to the land. Even in this age of rationalism there are laws that lay down punishment for those who show disrespect to the national flag or to the Constitution. The Bible is a symbol. But, believing that it strengthens the will of people to go on the right path, the American President holds it in his hand when he is sworn in. Consider the faith atheists have in black or black-and-red[5] and the mental strength they derive from the same: they are prepared to lay down their lives for it. It is doubtful whether we who call ourselves theists have the same faith in the signs and symbols of our religion or whether we derive any mental strength from them.

I wanted to say that a sign or mark which stands for a thing can cause good or bad to it. It is the same with the tāṭaṅka. If the husband has come to harm, the tāṭaṅka has to be removed and if the tāṭaṅka does not come down it means the husband is safe. At her marriage, Ambā must have worn the tāṭaṅka. She and the Lord must have looked upon it as a sign of saumāṅgalya. Then how much power and value it must have gained? If Ambā is the protector of the life of Īśvara, the tāṭaṅka is the protector of her saumāṅgalya. It acquires a life and strength of its own and protects Ambā. Will she be ever divested of that protection? Never. It will never lose its place as the protector of her saumāṅgalya. When it refuses to leave her and remains with her, the Lord, her husband, will not come to any harm from anything, whether it be poison or the great deluge. This is tāṭaṅka mahimā, the greatness of tāṭaṅka, that the Ācārya speaks about.

Ultimately, all mahimā, all glory or greatness, belongs to Ambā who is the source of all śakti, all power. It is she who gives each object the quality that is distinctive to it. Whatever there is regarded as great, that is "mama tejo'ṁśa-saṁbhavam (arising as an aspect of my strength)", says Kṛṣṇa Paramātman[6]. The Ācārya also says, "Tava janani tāṭaṅka mahimā" — "Mother, it is all the glory of your tāṭaṅka."

Notes & References

[1] Kālidāsa's *Śyāmalādaṇḍakam*, 6

[2] Pṛthivī-kṣetra, one of the sacred pañcābhūta kṣetras or shrines connected with the earth among the five elements. Kāñcī is the kṣetra representing the earth out of the five.

[3] Ap-kṣetra is a sacred place representing water of the five elements.

[4] Tejas (fire), Vāyu (air or wind) and ākāśa (space) are the other three of the five elements.

[5] Certain political parties that claim to advocate rationalism and are non-believers have adopted red, black or black-and-red as their symbols.

[6] Yad yad vibhūtimat sattvaṁ śrīmad ūrjitam eva vā
Tad tad evāvagaccha tvaṁ mama tejo'ṁśa saṁbhavam.
— *Bhagavadgītā*, 10.41.

Chapter 68

Why Viṣṇu is Left Out

Brahmā and Indra and indeed all denizens of the celestial world perish [in the great deluge]: "Vipadyante viśve Vidhi-Śatamakhādyā diviṣadaḥ" (Stanza 28). "Vidhi" is Brahmā, "Śatamakhan" is one who has performed a hundred horse sacrifices, that is Indra. Earlier, "Mukunda-Brahmā-Indra" were mentioned; which means Viṣṇu was also included among those who performed nīrājana to Ambā with their crowns. In that context Rudra was left out. Here, among those destroyed during the great dissolution the name of Viṣṇu is omitted. In an earlier stanza (26) in which occur the words, "mahā-saṁhāre asmin", the Ācārya has given a list of those who perish in the mahā-saṁhāra and says: "Harirāpnoti viratīm", *i.e.* "Mahāvisnu comes to an end." But here (Stanza 28) Hari is not mentioned. Perhaps the Ācārya was reluctant to speak again and again of Ambā's brother Viṣṇu perishing.

Not that alone. The reference here is to the celestials who partook of the divine ambrosia: "Sudhāmapyāsvādya diviṣadaḥ." There is no help that Mahāviṣṇu did not render those performing the amṛta-mathana, the churning of the ocean for ambrosia. It was in fact he who suggested to the celestials (devas) that by taking the amṛta churned out from the ocean they could remain deathless. Then he too joined in the endeavour. When the Mandara mountain, which was being used as the churning rod, got loosened from the churning rope it was he who took the Tortoise incarnation and supported the mountain on his back to make it steady. When, in the end, amṛta appeared he it was who brought it from under the ocean in a pot, taking the form of Dhanvantari. Viṣṇu also assumed the form of Mohinī, the Enchantress, and saw to it that the asuras were denied the elixir and that the devas alone got it. It was also he who distributed it to them. So it is clear that he himself did not sit in the row of those who partook of the ambrosia. He distributed it to all but did not himself have it. In the *Bhāgavatam* it is mentioned that he did not consume the amṛta. That is why his name is not included in the stanza.[1]

Ambā being an eternal sumaṅgalī her husband Paramaśiva is not included among those who perish in the deluge. Rudra, Maheśvara, Sadāśiva, Kāmeśvara — they are also not added to the "list" of those who die since they are always thought of in association with Paramaśiva. The Ācārya is particularly careful about cherishing the eternal and auspicious beauty of the Mother who protects Śiva (he himself has a name meaning Maṅgala) by remaining an everlasting sumaṅgalī.

Note

[1] When the Great Master was reminded of the two names of Viṣṇu occurring in the *Viṣṇu-Sahasranāmam* "Amṛtapa" and "Amṛtāśaḥ", he pointed out that the Ācārya, in his commentary on the *Viṣṇu-Sahasranāmam*, had given the first meaning of the names as "one who imbibes the amṛta rasa that is one's own Ātman". That Viṣṇu partook of the gross amṛta (the ambrosia churned out of the ocean) he had given as a second meaning. The latter had the support of popular tradition, though in fact Viṣṇu did not have this amṛta. The Gurudeva observed that we must accept the first meaning given by the Ācārya.

Chapter 69

The Theft Committed by Ambā

The Vedas proclaim that of the two bodies of Śiva called "Śivā tanu", one is entirely Ambikā's. In the Ardhanarīśvara form Ambā and Śiva are half and half in one body. The Ācārya integrates the two views in a stanza and charges Ambā with having committed theft (Stanza 23). Śiva and Śakti seem to be separate as well as united together, they seem to be two separate entities bodily as well as one entity bodily. Despite these images of the two, the supreme truth is that they are always one inseparable Reality, one Caitanya (life force). The two being separate individually; the two being half and half of one body; Śiva being a liṅga and Ambā entwining round him in the form of a serpent; he as Dakṣiṇāmūrti, retaining her within himself without revealing her outwardly, and he remaining all by himself — and against all these is Durgā. Each form represents a concept, a truth. The concepts or truths are told as stories. Poets play with such concepts or even apparently ridicule them. It is in this manner that the Ācārya has spoken of Ambā as a "thief". It is a big theft she has committed. "She has stolen her husband's entire body. Is not stolen property kept hidden? Thus Ambā has concealed her husband's body in her. Not only is she guilty of stealing it, she has swallowed the property stolen!" The Ācārya has composed a stanza (23) suggesting this.

Tvayā hṛtvā vāmam vapur-aparitṛptena manasā
Śarīrārdham Sambhor-aparamapi śaṅke hṛtamabhūt
Yadetat tvadrūpam sakalamaruṇābham trinayanam
Kucābhyāmānamram kuṭila-śaśicūḍālamakuṭam

"Tvayā hṛtvā": at the very start of the stanza Ambā is charged with theft.

"Tvayā" = by you; "vāmam vapuḥ": the left side of Śiva's body, "hṛtvā" = has been stolen. You may construe the same from the context as "after having stolen". "Mother, even after the left side of Parameśvara's body having been stolen...." What is meant by "even after"? "Aparitṛptena manasā'' = with a mind not fully satisfied : you were not fully satisfied even after having stolen half of Śiva's body. "Śambhoḥ aparam śarīrardham api hṛtam abhūt"= the other half of Śiva's body was also stolen. "Not satisfied with stealing one half of Śiva's body, you stole the other half also."

Instances of verbal play abound in the hymns composed by the Ācārya. Here, in the first line, there is "apari" in the compound word "aparitṛptena"; "vapuḥ" + "aparitṛptena" = "vapuraparitṛptena". In the next line we have "Śambhoraparam". There is "aparam" in this: "Śambhoḥ aparam". But "apari" and "aparam" have different meanings. "Purṇam"-"paripurṇam": the usage is like "tyāgam"-"parityāgam". The prefix "pari" reinforces the meaning of the word of which it is the prefix. So to make "tṛpti" (satisfaction) whole we have "paritṛpti". The opposite of "paritṛpti" is "aparitṛpti". "By stealing half the body (of Śiva) how can you be wholly satisfied? You were only half satisfied." With this inner meaning, the Ācārya says, "With a mind not fully satisfied" : "aparitṛptena manasā." "Aparam" in "śarīrārdham aparam" means the other, that is the other half of the body.

It is well known that Ambā is only the left side of Śiva's body. That is how the Ācārya was expecting to see Śiva, as Ardhanārīśvara. But what did he actually see? "I am going to see Mother and Father together, half and half (half of Mother and half of Father)." But what he saw was entirely the Mother, that is including the "dakṣiṇa bhāga", the right side. Father is all white, bright like pure crystal, Mother is red, so he had heard. So together they must be half white and half red. If she were Ardhāṅganī it must be like that. But the form the Ācārya saw was different. This is how he describes it: "sakalam aruṇābham" = "all red in radiance." One half of the side, which should be masculine, is it flat-chested? No. "Kucābhyam ānamram". Mother alone is seen, not Father. [The Mahāguru makes a gesture similar to that a child makes when it says, "Father.....not seen."] The Father's side of the body is also Mother.

Ardhanārīśvara is one of the many divine manifestations, is it not? Śiva and Ambā have many other manifestations, aspects, in which each is independent of the other as in these pairs: Paramaśiva-Pārvatī, Naṭarāja-Śivakāmasundarī and Kāmeśvara-Kāmeśvarī, the last-mentioned belonging to our subject, Śrīvidyā. In the pair, Kāmeśvara-Kāmeśvarī, Ambā's importance is diminished. (We have already dealt with this matter.) She, Kāmeśvarī, gives *darshan* alone. This is the case in Kāñcīpuram itself. However, the Ācārya pretends ignorance about such matters: he pretends to know only one manifestation in which Father and Mother are the two halves of one body. It is all for the purpose of the nindā-stuti of Ambā and of charging her with theft.

The Ācārya saw that the right side also belonged to Mother. If a man got half a kingdom he would not be satisfied with it and would try to seize the other half also. If one has nothing one will have no such urge. The Lord is so noble that in an act of generosity for which there is no parallel he gave half his body to his spouse Ambā. And the consequence of it was that she seized the other half of his body also, so it must have occurred to the Ācārya. But did the idea in fact occur to him? It was for his amusement, to make fun of Ambā, and it was all pretence.

Half thief, three-quarters thief, whole thief, so goes a saying. The half thief (female) here became full thief. And not an ordinary thief. She stole the body of one who was no other than her husband, Parameśvara, so thinks the Ācārya.

"Taskarāṇām pati" (chief of thieves): this is what the Vedas themselves call Parameśvara. What taskaram, what theft, did he commit? The child Saṁbandham answers the question in his very first song: *"Ullaṅkavar kalvan"* (one who steals the heart). Ambā is the thief who stole the body of this other thief who steals our hearts, so states the Ācārya.

But we must not make a statement in the form of a judgement that she committed theft. "The matter relates to a very, very high quarter. So we must not get into trouble by making a pronouncement in the form of a verdict." How do political leaders, even though free to say anything, respond to questions put to them by newspapermen? They take a non-committal attitude to issues on which they are questioned. "Why should we say anything that is likely to get us into trouble?" such is their approach. We often read in the papers of a politician "parrying a question". An accused who is known to be guilty is referred to as an alleged offender until the court decides that he is really a culprit. The Ācārya also thinks that he should be guarded in making a statement [about the theft he thinks Ambā has committed].

"Śarīrārdham Śambhoraparamapi hṛtamabhūt." The Ācārya does not say definitely that "the other half of Parameśvara's body was also stolen by you". Instead he says: "Śarīrārdham Śambhoraparamapi śaṅke hṛtamabhūt." He has added the word "śaṅke" in between. It means "I suspect", "I have a doubt", "I wonder whether...." "I wonder whether the other half also has been stolen by you." The Ācārya has made a tactful statement. He has done so because to raise a doubt about someone's action is to make a deeper impression on people about it than to pass a judgement on the same. If we point a finger at a man and say that he is a confirmed culprit, the matter will end there. Nobody will think about it again. But if we label a man a "suspicious character", it will lead to a whole lot of conjecture about him and people will tend to think that he is really a guilty person. Since it will be a conclusion arrived at on one's own, it will be well etched in one's mind. Without giving his verdict that Ambā has committed a theft and making himself liable to the charge of his having committed a sacrilege, the Ācārya has cleverly provoked people into believing that Ambā has in fact committed a theft. In poetry a fact should not be bluntly stated and there must be a mere hint of what the poet wants to convey. That is why the Ācārya uses the word "śaṅke" in the stanza.

"Śaṅke", "I suspect": if you say so you must have your reasons, is it not so? Without any prima facie evidence can you suspect anyone of having committed an offence, that too one like Parāśakti herself, and call her a thief?

The Ācārya mentions a number of reasons. The divine form he saw was entirely red in colour. We noted one of the reasons already mentioned : both sides of the chest of the form he saw had the characteristic of a woman. But how can that be enough? Ambā can be suspected to have committed a theft only if she had something that belonged to Śiva. A man accused of theft can be charge-sheeted only if he has in possession part of the stolen property. If the form seen by the Ācārya was entirely that of Ambā, it is likely that the left side of the form that is her own could have grown to cover the right side also to become a full female figure. Similarly, Śiva's right side could have grown to extend to the left for the whole body to become a male figure. When the Ācārya had *darshan*, the Lord might have gone out somewhere. Altogether unless Ambā had in her possession something specifically belonging to Śiva she could not be accused of theft.

The Ācārya was not unaware of such reasoning. It was after seeing Ambā with two parts associated with Śiva that he became suspicious of her. What were the two parts? One was "trinayanam" and the second "kuṭilaśaśicūdālamakuṭam". "The trinayanam" (three eyes) must be known to all. "Kuṭilaśaśicūḍalamakuṭam" means the crown with the crescent moon. The one with the three eyes is Candramaulīśvara, is he not? Are not the three eyes and the crescent-moon adornment distinctive characteristics of Śiva? The Vedas refer to him as "Tryaṁbaka" and it means one with three eyes. The dhyāna-śloka[g] recited during Rudrābhiṣeka has this; "Jyoti-sphāṭika-liṅga-mauli-vilasat-pūrṇendu." Here the moon adorning Śiva's head is mentioned. The form referred to is the crystal liṅga. In this form the head is adorned by the full moon. When the same deity has a face, eyes, ears and so on the moon adorning the head or crown is the cresent moon, not the full moon.

The three eyes and the crescent moon belong to Paramaśiva. But during his *darshan* the Ācārya saw these with Ambā. This surely meant that she had stolen Śiva. She could be charge-sheeted on the basis of this. And though the Ācārya uses the word "śaṅka" (that he suspects Ambā of having stolen Śiva) the reasons he gives for his suspicion are so strong as to make us pronounce the verdict that she is indeed a thief.

During the time of his worship, Ambā manifested herself to the Ācārya as Kāmeśvarī, the deity of *Saundaryalaharī*. Kāmeśvarī has the forehead eye, that is she has three eyes in all. "Sakalam aruṇābham", the form mentioned here is entirely red, and the same as "Sindūrāruṇa-vigrahām" occurring at the beginning of the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam* : "Sindūrāruṇa-vigrahām trinayanām". The same is seen as "Sakalamaruṇābham trinayanam" in the *Saundaryalaharī.* Although the Ācārya speaks in his hymn of Ambā's red complexion and her three eyes in the same way as in the *Sahasranāmam* there is a difference. He observes in a manner that amuses us that the first alone is hers properly and that the second was stolen by her from her husband. Then in the dhyāna-śloka[g] [of the *Sahasranāmam*] occurs this: "Tārānāyakaśekharām smitamukhīm-āpinavakṣoruhām". "Tārānāyakaśekharā" means the same as "Candraśekharī". Like the three eyes, the moon adorning the head also is one of the attributes of Ambā and that is why it is mentioned in the dhyāna-śloka. It is this "Tārānāyakaśekharām" that becomes the "Kuṭila-śaśi-cūdalaśekharām" in the *Saundaryalaharī.* The Ācārya, however, states that the (crescent) moon is stolen from her husband, or, more cautiously, he says he suspects that she has stolen it from her husband. "Āpīnavakṣoruhām": the Acarya expresses the same with the term, "Kucābhyāmānamram". This description [of the female anatomy], he adds, is proper to Ambā.

Although the red colour, the three eyes, the crescent moon adorning the head and the body of a woman are mentioned in the dhyāna-śloka and the Ācārya repeats the same, he observes that two of these are stolen from her husband. In this way he does her nindāstuti (ironic praise). The Ācārya who accuses Ambā of having stolen more than half of her husband's body has himself stolen half of the four that rightly belong to her.

In the *Sahasranāmam* itself Ambā has the names, "Tejovatī", "Trinayanā". There is also the appellation "Cārucandrakalādharā" meaning that she has the moon adorning her head ("Candraśekharī). In the *Śyāmalādaṇḍakam,* in the stanza dealing with the presiding deity of Śrīvidyā, that is Ambā, occurs these two names, "Caturbhuje, Candrakalāvatamse": the latter word means one who has the crescent moon adorning her head.

Actually, Ambā does have the crescent moon and the three eyes. The śāstras also say so and I have seen Ambā depicted with them in old paintings. However, the Ācārya, who was omniscient, pretends not to know this and in his hymn to the Mother he says that he suspects that they (the crescent moon and the three eyes) must have been stolen from Father. He must have stated so thinking thus : "Leave alone my omniscience. I am singing the praises of Mother. Without taking a certain amount of liberty, what kind of hymn do I compose if it cannot be a nindā-stuti." Ordinary people believe that the crescent moon and the three eyes truly belong to Śiva (alone). The Ācārya, the sarvajña (the omniscient), has expressed a view that is shared by common people.

Ambā who stole Śiva's body tried to hide the stolen property. But where? In herself. She wanted to conceal the body in herself. Just as there is Śakti in Śiva, there is Śiva in Śakti. Ambā swallowed one half of Śiva's body and that is how Ardhanārīśvara came into being. Gopālakṛṣṇa Bhāratī[8] sings: *"Pārvatiyenroru śimāṭṭi - atil pātiyai tinratuṇḍu".*

And Aruṇagirnāthar[8] chants : *"Yanakiya ennai vizhungi"*. Mothers cannot be excelled in affection. In their intense love for their children they exclaim as they cuddle them : "I feel like eating you, chewing you up." In the rush of love not only theft, even murder, is committed. What the Ācārya spoke of as a case of theft — indeed casting a doubt about his accusation by adding the word "saṅke" — I am stretching to a case of murder.

The Ācārya himself has spoken of a "murder case" in the *Śivānandalaharī* and it is on the basis of it that I am speaking now. What is that murder? Not one murder, but a number of murders. And all committed by the destroyer god Śiva. He killed an elephant and wore its skin and came to be called "Gajasaṁhāramūrti". The Ācārya has described the act as "Karīndrabhaṅgaḥ". Another case of "murder" is that of skinning a tiger. After this murder Śiva wore the skin round his waist. Again when he appeared in the guise of a hunter he killed a wild boar. During the time of saṁhāra (dissolution) he destroys all creatures. "Astajantuḥ", so the Ācārya speaks of it generally. With the skin of the elephant he killed as his upper cloth, with the skin of the tiger he slew as his loin-cloth and with a deer in one hand Śiva looks to the Ācārya like a lion after killing an elephant and like a tiger after catching a deer to eat it.

Like the lion that dwells in a cave, Śiva resides in the cave of our hearts. Both Śiva and the lion have a common name, "Pañcamukha". Since it has a broad face the lion is called "pañcamukha", while Śiva has five faces. The Ācārya has composed a stanza making a pun on the names of Śiva and the lion. In his *Śivānandalaharī* he says that, after eating the elephant and the tiger, the Śiva-lion keeps their skins as their outward signs. Here he says that, in the same way, Ambā has swallowed Śiva himself and retained outwardly the crescent moon and the eye in the forehead. The lion must have left the skins of the elephant and the deer without munching them. In the case of Ambā, after all of Siva's body has gone inside her, what seems an excess, the eye in the forehead, protrudes outside. We may take it that the crescent moon which is not a part of Śiva's body also thrusts itself out.

In truth there was neither theft nor murder. When we say that the great Mṛtyuñjaya (conqueror of death) never perishes even during the great deluge, because of the greatness of Ambā's tāṭaṅka, how can that

Eternal Being be murdered? As for the theft, poets have shown that it was in fact Śiva who was guilty of it. The credit must go to her for "a matter and a half"; but the fame which was due to her was stolen by him. What are these "one matter and a half''? The burning of Kāma, referred to earlier, and the destruction of Kāla (god of death). Since the burning of Kāma was accomplished by the forehead eye of Ardhanārīśvara, half the credit for it should go to Ambā. But Śiva has, as "Kāmadahanamūrti", appropriated all the fame for the burning of Kāma. The destruction of Kāla was brought about entirely by Ambā, with her left foot (that is Ardhanarīśvara's left foot), so she deserves all the credit, all the fame, for it. Śiva has performed eight heroic feats, and at eight sacred places. In Tirukkurukkai he is in the aspect of the destroyer of Kāma (Kāmadahanamūrti) and in Tirukkaḍavūr as Kālasaṁhāramūrti. It is Ambā who is the victim of the theft committed by her husband. Śiva is "taskarāṇām pati" ("chief of thieves", according to Śrī Rudram) and he is so even with regard to his wife. However, she remains the pativratā[8] supreme, having offered not only her body but also her Self to him.

The Ācārya sees her with the eye of a poet and when he says that Ambā has stolen her husband's body entire he creates aesthetic pleasure, literary rasa.

The idea behind the Ācārya's statement is that Ambā has absorbed Śiva in herself. Out of love for him she has contained the Lord in herself. Since he is in her, when we see her as Kāmākṣī in her full form, we do not miss anything. If there is joy in worshipping Mother and Father, is there not the same joy in seeing that that Father is present in Mother herself. Just as we are happy to think of Śiva as "Tāyumānavar" (Śiva who became Mother) we can also be happy in thinking of Ambā as "Tantaiyumānavar" (one who became Father).

The Brahman and the Brahma-Śakti are two. But they need not be in two forms. Ambā herself is the combined form of Śiva and Śakti. This non-dualistic truth is the ultimate inner message of the stanza.

[After a few moments' silence, the Great Seer speaks in an undertone...] The body (of Ambā) is all a radiance of red. We look at her thinking of her as Ambā alone, seeing each part of her body separately in that red. We see her forehead eye and the crescent moon. The two remind us of our deity [that is of the Kāñcī Śāṅkara Maṭha], Candramaulīśvara. But if we try to find out whether he is seen... No, he is not seen. But for the two (the forehead eye and the crescent moon) nothing else is seen of Śiva's body. [The Mahāsvāmi speaks a little more loudly.] It is in such a state of experience that the Ācārya asks : "O you who appropriated half his body and are not satisfied with it have now stolen the rest of his body also.''

The amṛta, the nectar, that is Śiva cannot be shared. It must be consumed wholly. Ambā did precisely that.

Chapter 70

Dedicating One's All

There has been in between talk of offering both body and Ātman to the Lord. This theme is clearly dealt with in the stanza (27) beginning with the words "Japo jalpaḥ".

Japo jalpaḥ śilpam sakalamapi mudrāviracanā
Gatiḥ prādakṣiṇya-kramaṇam-aśanādyāhuti-vidhiḥ
Praṇāmaḥ samveśah sukhamakhilam ātmārpaṇa-dṛśā
Saparyā-paryāya-stava bhavatu yanme vilasitam

In brief the śloka means that all that we do we must do as an offering to Ambā. Pūjā, japa, mudrā (gesturing with the fingers), circumambulating the goddess and prostrating ourselves before her, making offerings in Caṇḍī homa, thus worshipping her in various ways: all these are of course necessary. But pūjā, japa and homa do not take up much of our time and the rest of the time we tend to spend in worldly work or in seeking sensual gratification. This must change. Instead of being devoted to Ambā for a brief hour only we must always be engaged in worshipping her, in doing pūjā to her, in performing homa, in muttering her names. This applies not only to upāsakas[g] but to all people.

"How is this possible? How can we be engaged in such worship all the time?" it will be asked. "Don't we have to bathe, eat, sleep? Don't we have to talk to people, speak to them a few loving words? Don't we have to visit places? Must we not also spend our time in serving people? Even great jñānins do these things."

Yes. Let that be. Everything is Ambā's sport. But how do jñānins, who know everything to be her sport, keep doing things or do not keep doing things? Try to be like them yourself. Right now it will not be possible for you to be like them. Make an effort and little by little try to come up to their level, their state. Constant practice, constant endeavour will be needed. For the present, bathing, eating, speaking, sleeping and other activities are carried on because of her power. Keep remembering now and then that we cannot do anything on our own, by ourselves. Keep cultivating, developing, this attitude. When you remember while eating that it is because of Ambā's power that you eat, you will not feel like taking in undesirable food. If you remember that it is she who has empowerd you to walk you will be reluctant to go to the races or to the movies. If you remember that speech is her gift you will not be inclined to waste it in gossip, in idle talk or in discussing unsavoury topics. When you are conscious that your hands and feet owe their strength to her, you will not do any wrong. In due course you will have the realisation that she it is who makes you do everything, not only what you do with your body but what you do with your mind, that is the thinking and planning you do. And instead of feeling that it is you who are doing things and instead of wanting to do things on your own, you will eventually leave everything to her, and will be resigned to her will. In the end all the bonds of worldly existence, all the urges and feelings of Māyā, will be traced to the workings of the mind. Turning to the path of jñāna and eradicating the mind seem an impossible task. So it would be enough if in our devotion to her the mind is offered to Ambā; we will then be freed from its effects. Afterwards, whether she causes us to keep talking, keep doing things, or keep travelling or whether she makes us not do any of these, we will remain serene inwardly. The Ācārya has blessed us with this stanza the purpose of which is to inspire us to pray to the goddess to take us to such a state.

"Japo-jalpaḥ." "Jalpa" means talk, speech, all talk including indistinct babble or prattle. In the state mentioned above even jalpa will be japa. "May all my talk be the muttering (japa) of your names."

"It is necessary in the beginning to be initiated into mantras like Pañcadaśī and Ṣoḍaśī. Japa and similar devotions are necessary to keep us away from useless talk, talk that leads to wrong-doing or sinful things. But from japa as a deliberate practice we will come to a stage when we will have the consciousness that everything that we utter is the japa of your names." [Everything we speak will be the muttering of the names of Ambā.]

"Sakalam śilpam api mudrā viracanā." It means that "all the things I do with my hands, may they be the hand gestures I make during the pūjā I porform to you." "Mudrā viracana" means executing mudrās or hand gestures. "May that be all my śilpam." "Silpam" must be understood to mean work, all activity. In Tamiḷ it has come to mean only sculpture. It may be because it denotes man creating forms, images, in the same way as Brahmā performs his function of creation..

"I need not go in search of a temple to circumambulate you. Gatiḥ prādakṣinya kramaṇam". "Wherever my legs take me, may that mean circumambulating you." "Do I not eat?" "Aśanādi" : "aśana" = eating or taking food; "aśanādi" = eating and so on. With the suffix "ādi" the term suggests not only eating or consuming with the mouth but consuming or enjoying oneself with the eyes (seeing objects, scenes), with the ears (listening to speech, music, etc), with the body's sense of touch. All this means the experience derived through the sense organs. All "eating" denotes "āhuti vidhi"—and "may it mean offering oblations to you in the sacrificial fire."

During mealtime, before we start to eat, we offer food as an oblation to the five vital breaths in us. The Lord says in the Gītā that he resides in the bodies of all creatures as the jaṭharāgni (gastric fire or fluid) called Vaiśvānara to digest the food taken in by them. If we remain conscious of this fact, would we like to eat impure or undesirable food, meat, onions and so on, or drink liquor. Similarly, if we realise that it is the Lord that enjoys what we see with our eyes, hear with our ears, smell with our nose and feel with our skin, we will be averse to involve them in evil objects or matters.

"Samveśa" : "the act of my lying down." My lying down to sleep is doing praṇāmam to you, paying you obeisance. If we think that when we lie down to sleep we are at the feet of Ambā how peacefully would the day end.

"Why should the list be lengthened? In short, I need not make any special effort, nor be engaged in any difficult sādhana or religious or spiritual practice to reach you, like constantly muttering your names, performing sacrifices, doing meditation, circumambulating you and so on. If I keep doing happily whatever—"

"Sukham akhilam...yanme vilasitam."

— "all the things I keep doing happily, all my doings"—

"Tava saparyā paryāyaḥ bhavatu."

"All the things I do, may they be pūjā performed to you."

"Saparyā" means pūjā. "Paryāya" has a number of meanings, one of them being "substitute". "May all my work be a substitute for the pūjā performed to you." "Saparyā-paryāya" : we have here the figure of speech called "yamaka", repetition of words similar in sound.

To say that you do things happily, without straining yourself, that you do things naturally, is very meaningful. The mind now, not being bound to anything, will adhere to the moral way without any strain. Tāyumānavar[g] says : "Everything is your doing." Likewise, if you always think that everything is the doing of Ambā and dedicate yourself, dedicate your mind to her, you will adhere to the moral path with ease, naturally, without any special effort on your part. Does not happiness lie in being natural? If one thinks that whatever one does is dedicated to Ambā one is likely to be happy to that extent. When we forsake all attachments and go to Ambā for refuge, the righteous conduct essential to eternal happiness will come naturally to us. It is a state in which we may not even make a conscious effort to live a moral life.

The *Bhāgavatam* speaks of nine types of devotion and of them "Ātmanivedanam" is the highest. The Lord, speaking of the same in the concluding stanzas of the Gītā, describes it as total surrender. The Ācārya teaches the same in this stanza (27).

"Sukhamakhilam Ātmasamarpaṇa-dṛśā": "Ātmasamarpaṇam" is the same as "Ātmanivedanam", total surrender, "śaraṇāgati". This is the life-breath of the śloka. Not only of this śloka, it is the life-breath of all religious systems [smiling within himself the Mahāguru continues...] It is indeed the life-breath of life itself. "Ātmasamarpaṇa-dṛśā" means "in the attitude of offering this life itself wholly to Ambā". Only if you have such an attitude will your speech ever become the muttering of her names, your work will become hand gestures made during worship, and all such things mentioned earlier [will become her adoration]. "May it happen so by virtue of your Ātmasamarpaṇam"; that is the meaning implied by the Ācārya when he says "bhavatu", the word that comes later. The Ācārya has painted a picture of how a man who has offered his very life to Ambā (who has totally surrendered to her) will conduct himself. His life will all be pūjā— "saparyā-paryāyaḥ vilasitam."

The Ācārya has blessed us with another stanza which expresses almost the same idea. It is part of the "Śivamānasa-pūjā-stotram"

Ātmā tvam Girijā matiḥ sahacarāḥ prāṇāḥ śarīram gṛham
Pūjā te viṣa-yopa-bhoga-racanā nidrā samādhi sthitiḥ
Sañcāraḥ padayoḥ pradakṣiṇavidhiḥ stotrāṇi sarvā giro
Yad yat karma karomi tattad-akhilam Śambho tavārādhanam

"You, the Paraśiva, is my Ātman; my mind is Ambikā, Girijā, daughter of the mountain; my five vital breaths are your attendants, the Pramatha gaṇas; my body is your temple; all my enjoyments are your pūjā; my sleep is samādhi; whatever I speak is your hymn; whatever I do, O Śambhu, is indeed your worship."

In the Gītā the Lord exhorts us similarly to offer everything of ours to him. "Whatever you do, whatever sacrifice you perform, whatever charity you make, whatever tapas you do (whatever you do with concentration, with intensity, is tapas) offer them to me.

Yat karoṣi yad aśnaśi, yajjuhoṣi dadāsi yat
Yat tapasyasi Kaunteya tat kuruṣva madarpaṇam
—Bhagavadgitā, *9.27*

"En śeyalāvatu yādu onrumillai." "Nanre śeyvāy, pizhai śeyvāy nāno idarku nāyakame."[1] The Nālvar [Tirujñānasaṁbandhar, Sundaramūrti, Appar, Māṇikkavācakar], the Āzhvārs and great men belonging to other religions speak of total surrender. It is surrender that leads to liberation which is the highest goal of this life itself.

If you follow the path of jñāna it is the "annihilation of the mind"; if you take the path of devotion the same becomes "śaraṇāgati", surrender. The two paths take you to the same goal: the bliss of liberation in this very life, jīvanmukti.

Reference

[1] The first quotation is from Paṭṭiṇattār and the second from Māṇikkavācakar.

Chapter 71

Śiva-Śakti : Life-Body

Only so long as there is life in us can we mutter the names of Ambā, make hand gestures (mudrās) as we worship her, circumambulate her and pay obeisance to her—or walk, talk, eat and sleep. It is Ambā who makes us do all these things as the life of our life. And if our ordinary talk or even babble becomes the devout muttering of her names, if all our work becomes hand gestures of her worship and if every act of ours becomes a part of the pūjā performed to her by us, she indeed is the one who is the cause behind all these. But to think that it is our life that makes our body do all its activities is not true. There is another life behind our individual life and this individual life is governed by the greater life ... We must develop the attitude that it is she who makes our individual life do all that our body does. We must also know that it is not just one life, one individual life, that figures here. Ambā who has the whole world as her body and is the larger life infuses life into all of us. When we recognise this truth we also recognise that everything that happens in this world is caused by it, by that larger life. There is a saying (in Tamiḷ), "Without Him not even an atom can stir." When we are convinced about the truth behind this idea our resolve to dedicate ourselves utterly and to offer ourselves to It—the greater life that is Ambā—will be strengthened. Ambā's cosmic form is dealt with in two successive stanzas (34 and 35) in the hymn. The first:

Śarīram tvam Śambhoḥ śaśi-mihira-vakṣoruha-yugam
Tavātmānam manye Bhagavati navātmānamanagham
Ataḥ śeṣaḥ śeṣītyayamubhaya-sādhāraṇatayā
Śthitaḥ saṁbandho vām samarasa-parānandaparayoḥ

The Ācārya says at first, "You are Parameśvara's body." "Śaṁbhoḥ śarīram tvam", that is Īśvara's body is Ambā. Similar to the statement made earlier, he observes that she has stolen his entire body and not just half of it. But here the body is not red in colour, nor is it female; it also does not have the forehead eye and the crescent moon. Ambikā here is Īśvara's body which embraces millions and millions or trillions and trillions of Brahmāṇḍas. That is the virāṭ svarūpa [a form that embraces all the worlds and fills all space].

For the Paramātman all the universes constitute his body. And it is the Parabrahman that is the life in it, the Ātman in it -- and it is again the Parabrahman that imparts not only life to the prapañca but also knowledge and forms the basis of all its functions.

What is said here seems different from the statement made in the very first stanza of the *Saundaryalaharī*. There it was said that without Śakti, Śiva could not even stir a bit. It means that Śiva is inert or insentient and that it is Ambā that is the life activating that inert body. If you say that Śiva without Śakti is śava (corpse) does it not refer to a body without life. Here the Ācārya says, "Mother, you are the body of Śaṁbhu (Śiva)."

However, these statements are from two different viewpoints. If you examine the first stanza carefully you will notice that the Ācārya does not view Śiva without Śakti as śava. To glorify Ambā he says that she is the life-giving principle. Although it could be construed that without her Śiva is śava—I myself took the view in that context — it is not entirely true. The Ācārya speaks from the Advaitik point of view of Śiva as the Nirguṇa Brahman, functionless, quiescent. That state of fullness can never be one lacking in life force. But if it does not have the awareness of its fullness, it is as good as not existing — as if it were dead. "As if", "like" — not in truth in a dead state, not in reality. It is neither in a dead state nor in a non-dead state: it is in fact in no state at all. The Ācārya says that Ambā is the jñānaśakti who is the cause of self-awareness without the Brahman. Then he says that the jñānaśakti associated Īśvara with the power of desire and the power of doing and made the functionless entity perform a function. He further points out that Ambā remains the life of Śiva in the same way as the Nirguṇa Brahman becomes aware of Itself.

What is mentioned here is the functioning Brahman. When the Saguṇa Brahman, that is Īśvara, is activated by Kāmeśvarī, Īśvara himself becomes the functioning Brahman and conducts the world. Thus the world or cosmos becomes his body and the life in it, the power of action, becomes Īśvara.

There is Kāmeśvarī who is icchāśakti, the power of desire, and this power goads the Parabrahman, the primordial Reality... Advaita does not go into any elaborate explanation of its concepts. "It is the Brahman that becomes the Īśvara with attributes (Saguṇa) through Māyā to conduct the affairs of the world. Māyā has no life of its own and is inert. It obtains its life from the Brahman and veils that very Brahman, revealing to it the cosmos. And the Brahman conducts the world as Īśvara in company with Māyā, so it is said in the non-dualistic texts. That the Brahman is Śiva and that Ambā is Māyā and so on I have already mentioned earlier. Since the cosmos appears because of Māyā, it can be said to be Māyā, otherwise Ambā. That Māyā is inert. Since it shines because of the life force of the Brahman it—that is Māyā—can be said to be Ambā. And Śiva who is in the place of the Brahman can be said to be its life. This is the meaning of the words, "Śarīram tvam Śaṁbhoḥ": "You are the body of Īśvara."

The Sānkhya system has more or less the same view. According to it, Puruṣa, the Reality that is the support of life, and Prakṛti, the cause behind the appearance of the cosmos, are like life and the body. It is explained like this: "Of the two functions, veiling the Brahman, and making it appear as the cosmos, greater importance is given to veiling that is Māyā. Even in ordinary conversation we often remark that something or other has 'disappeared like Māyā'. Prakṛti, instead of merely veiling, gives strength to a work being done. When we see that Prakṛti is understood as Nature, we find that in the place of the fundamental Reality, importance is given to the cosmos in the form of a functioning entity. That importance is given to the 24 tattvas such as the five elements, the five tanmātras, the five sense organs of the jīvātman (individual Self) shows that this world and its activities have a greater importance in the Sānkhya system. Advaita reproduces in its system these 24 tattvas since they have gained a high place among intellectuals. But, otherwise, a knowledge of these serves no purpose in the religious and spiritual practice of the Advaitin — nor is it disadvantageous for him not to know them. On the whole importance is given in the Śānkhya system to Prakṛti undergoing pariṇāma or change as the living cosmos." The Ācārya speaks in this manner, conceiving Ambā as Īśvara's body and then as the body of the universe, with her breasts being the sun and the moon. This, he says, is more in keeping with the Śānkhya than with the non-dualistic system.

Although the first part of this stanza can be explained according to the Advaita and Sānkhya systems, matters coming later belong to the kaula and Samaya traditions of the Śākta doctrine. There is support in the Sānkhya system for the opinion expressed first (that Ambā is Śiva's body and that she is also the embodiment of the cosmos). Outward worship with yantras and idols is kaula while Samaya is adoring Ambā within oneself, in one's heart space (hṛdayākāśa), conceptually. The latter is called Samaya because it regards Śiva and Ambā as being equal on five counts.

Chapter 72

The Mother who Suckles All

The Śeṣa-Śeṣī Concept

Philosophical concepts may be within our grasp or they may be beyond us. Even if we do not understand them it does not matter. Love cannot be beyond anybody's reach. That is what we need. That love is the love of the Mother of all the universe, the love of the one who is indeed the embodiment of the universe. When the Ācārya speaks of her as the body in which inheres the life of the Lord, he brings her to us as the milk of our Mother's breasts. Even though he conceives of her as one not possessing a body but as one embodying the universe, as virāṭ svarūpa, that is embracing all the worlds and filling all space, he is reluctant to speak of her as being inert or insentient. He is unable to forget her motherhood or motherliness. That is why, thinking of that virāṭ svarupa, that cosmic figure, as a mother who suckles all the creatures of the world, he mentions her as "śaśi-mihira-vakṣoruhayugam" (Stanza 34), which means that the sun and the moon are her two breasts.

Like a mother suckling her children, the World Mother suckles all living beings, and even all plants, with the rays of the sun and the moon. (Plants too have life. Early in this century — 20th — Jagadīś Candra Bose established scientifically that plants have life. But we had known it long before him from the time of the Vedas.)

What does it mean when it is said that Ambā feeds all living beings with the light of the sun and the moon? It is well known that the vegetable kingdom is sustained by the rays of the sun. Seeds sown in a place that is shut off from sunlight will not sprout and grow. Plants absorb the "essence of life" directly from the sun. Moreover, we who cannot directly receive it from the sun are indirectly provided with it by the plants. Just as we light the fireplace and cook our food on it, plants act as a solar cooker for us: they preserve solar power for us in a digestible form. When we eat vegetables or cereals like rice, it is the "prasāda"[g] of the sun that gives us sustenance, prasāda that we receive in the form of its power.

If the earth is a living planet it is because of the sun and the biosphere it creates. The power ceaselessly released from its light pervades all atoms and the photosynthesis that takes place in the plants because of it sustains this living world. This fact discovered by modern science was known to us eons ago as is to be seen from our ancient texts like the Vedas and śāstras. Mantras like the Gāyatrī are meant for us to receive the sun's energy directly in the same manner as plants receive them. We have gone many steps further than science and have not stopped with gaining physical strength. By chanting the Gāyatrī we derive the power to stimulate us inwardly, to make our intelligence, intellect, brighter and more vigorous, to give us strength in our spiritual practice and to enable us to reach the Ultimate. The sun's power is affectionately termed by us as "Savitā" and "Sāvitrī", the mother who has given birth to us and given life to us. This power is also a part of the primordial Śakti, that is Parāśakti, the Mother, who is at the source of all, the one who feeds us with milk, so says the Ācārya.

The Ācārya mentions the moon also in this context. What sustenance do we get from its rays? Moonlight is so cool and it gives us delight which itself is a kind of nourishment. Moreover, we must remember that medicinal plants derive their therapeutic property from the moon. By eating indiscriminately the things produced in the sun we suffer from this or that ailment and we go in search of remedies. The medicinal herbs derive their nourishment from the moon.

Somalatā is foremost among these herbs, according to the Vedas themselves. "Soma" means the moon. The essence of soma, somarasa, may be called amṛta, the divine ambrosia of the world. The main feature of soma sacrifices is the offering of the essence of the soma plant. The nectar flowing from the crown of a yogin's head is to be traced to the moon.

The tides of the ocean are caused chiefly by the attraction of the moon. The seasons, seasonal winds, rains are all connected with the moon. The sun's rays produce water vapour which comes down to earth as rain; rain enriches plant life and in turn brings us a bountiful harvest. Everybody knows that the sun feeds us in this way and keeps us alive.

But the tides also have a role in producing rains and the moon has a greater part in producing the tides. So it means that the moon too nourishes us.

That Ambā sustains us as Annapūrṇesvarī by providing us milk through the sun and the moon is very appropriate. To say that Ambikā suckles all living beings (including plants) through the sun's flow of heat and the moon's flow of coolness is a scientific truth told in the language of devotion.

If the sun illumines our intelligence, the moon is the presiding deity of the mind. We know as a fact that just as on the full moon and new moon days tides are caused in the ocean of salt, the ocean of the mind is also affected. We note it in the case of mentally ill people. That they are called "lunatics" shows that their condition is connected with the moon. ("Luna" is the Latin for the moon.)

The sun and the moon have the power to bless us in this world and the next. This is shown by the fact that on the new moon libations are offered to the fathers, that the new moon is called "a day of fullness" and that the chanting of mantras during eclipses has an extra degree of potency. These blessings are ultimately droplets in the milk of jñāna granted by Ambā. It is in consideration of all this that the Ācārya speaks of the sun and the moon as Ambā's breasts, "śaśi-mihira-vakṣoruhayugam".

It is customary to describe the sun and the moon as the right and left eyes of the Paramātman. There is a stanza (48) in this hymn which says, addressing Ambā : "Your right eye is the sun that creates daytime and your left eye is the moon that causes night." I spoke earlier of the *Sahasranāmam* saying that Ambā's tāṭaṅkas (ear-ornaments) are the sun and the moon. But the idea that the sun and the moon are the breasts of Ambā who suckles us, her children, is profoundly moving.

"Śeṣa"; "Śeṣī" = property; owner of property.

From now on philosophical concepts are dealt with and Ambā and Īśvara are said to be associated with "Śeṣa" and Śeṣī". I shall explain the idea briefly.

The body called "śarīra" has a life in it called "śarīrī". "Śarīram tvam Śambhoḥ". It means Ambā and Iśvara have the relationship of śarīra and śarīrī. Since we see that life inheres the body we should not mistake it to be the property of the body. The purse is in our coat pocket, so we think we are its owner and that the purse is our property. We must not think the relationship is similar in respect of the life and the body. As the Ācārya himself remarks in his *Ṣaṭpadī Stotram,* to think that the body owns life is as foolish as to think that the ocean belongs to the waves, that the waves are not the property of the ocean. Can we think so because the waves are on the surface of the ocean and beneath them are the waveless waters of the ocean? It is the same case with body and life. It is life that controls the body. If it departs the body will decompose and emit a foul smell. Then that life adopts another body. So life is the owner and body its property. Property is "svam" and the (Tamiḷ) word "*svottu*" is derived from it. If property is "svam", the one who owns it is "svāmī". Tāyumānavar[g] says: "Everything is your property." Parameśvara has created everything in the universe, sentient beings and insentient objects — and they are all his property.

"Śeṣī" is the owner, prabhu or lord; "śeṣa" is his property, his slave. Before stating that "everything is your property", Tāyumānavar says: "All are your slaves." The body is under the sway of the spirit or life and obeys its orders.

To speak of the sentient world and the Lord as śarīra and śarīrī respectively and, on the same basis, as śeṣa and śeṣī is a cardinal tenet of the Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-dualism) of Rāmānujācārya[g].

According to Advaita, when Parameśvara is the Nirguṇa Brahman his "I-consciousness" is Ambā. The Ācārya has spoken about it first, about the subject of "what is one's own". This is the inner meaning of the first half of the very first stanza of the hymn. In a subsequent stanza (7), he mentions clearly that Ambā is Parameśvara's Āhopuriṣikā. In this state Śiva and Śakti are inseparable and there is no question of their being regarded as Śeṣa and Śeṣī. Later, accepting the reality of the dualistic world, of the empirical world, have we not dealt with the Trinity, the deities performing the pañcakṛtya and so on? In this state it is only because of a tiny fraction of Ambā's power that they are able to perform their functions (Stanza 2). The five deities carry out their functions if she does no more than flicker her eyebrows (Stanza 24). Here she is the "mahā-yajamānī", Śeṣī, and the deities who do her bidding are Śeṣas. Among them there are Rudra, Maheśvara and Sadāsīva who are aspects of Śiva. That Ambā is Śeṣī to them, they themselves being Śeṣas, is the subject of the present stanza (34)

Above all it must be noted that from a worm, from an insect, to the deities performing the pañcakṛtya, the bodies of all have been created by Ambā and she dwells in all of them as their life, as the one Śakti. So like us who are Śeṣas to that Śeṣī is Īśvara who too is her Śeṣa.

According to the Śākta system also Ambā is Śeṣī and Śiva is Śeṣa. This is expressed by the words, "Tavātmānam manye Bhagavati navātmānam anagham."

Īśvara is said to have nine "aṇgas", starting with "kala" and ending with "jīvātman". That is what is called "navātmā". Ambā imbues them with life and rules over them. So she is Śarīrī or Śeṣī and Īśvara with his nine aṅgas is her Śarīra (body) and Śeṣa.

All this on one side. But there is another side according to which, if there is a Śakti, there must be one who possesses it. The one who possesses Parāśakti is Śiva. Here, when we speak of the other side, he is Śeṣī and she is Śeṣā. As Īśvara he is the functioning Brahman, the Saguṇa Brahman. It must be accepted that in this aspect he is life and Ambā is body, Ambā here meaning all those who come under the province of his function, the sentient beings and the insentient objects. He is then Śeṣī and Ambā is Śeṣā.

The word "śeṣa" is usually understood as remainder. What is left over is "śeṣam". "Left over" implies the existence of a larger original entity of which it remains a part. What is śeṣī then? That of which something is a remainder is śeṣī. If the Paramātman is the original source, the fundamental entity, all this world is constituted of droplets from it. So the world and Īśvara stand in the relationship of Śeṣa-Śeṣī. "From the Brahman that is full in the true sense has emerged this cosmos which *appears* to be full. Even after the outward emergence of the cosmos from it the Brahman remains as full as ever."[1] These Upaniṣadic words refer indeed to Śeṣa-Śeṣī. "Śarīram tvam Śambhoḥ" : Ambā is

Śeṣā, the Lord is Śeṣī. This is an expression of the view that there exists inwardly life that is the Brahman, the serene Śiva, the body outside of it being Śakti in the form of the cosmos.

Śaiva extremists say that Śiva is life and that Ambā is body, whereas Śākta extremists say, reversing this, that Ambā is life and that Śiva is body. Śaivas and Śāktas who have had inward realisation (anubhavīs) say in the texts composed by them that equal importance must be given to the two, Śiva and Ambā. It is an aspect of this doctrine of the equality of the two which means that, if Siva is Śeṣī and Ambā Śeṣā, Ambā can also be Śeṣī and Śiva Śeṣa, and that if Śiva is Śarīrī and Ambā Śarīra, Ambā can also be Śarīrī and Śiva Śarīra.

Without making any distinction between the Śaiva and Śākta systems on the one hand and between Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified monism), Sānkhya and Advaita on the other, the Ācārya says here that the jagat or cosmos which Advaitins reject as Māyā is the body and property of the Paramātman. But viewing the world from the empirical point of view and taking into account the state of the common people, he says that the cosmos is the body and that the Paramātman is its Antaryāmin or Inner Controller, thus *seeming* to speak from the point of view of qualified non-dualism.

The Ācārya says that the Śeṣa-Śeṣī relationship is "ubhaya-sādhāraṇa". It means it is based on the equality of Ambā and Śiva. That the two are equal is shown in five different ways. The Samaya concept of the Śākta system is based on this. Both Śiva and Ambā have the same abode, they have similar rūpa or appearance, they have the same function and the same status. Even their names are similar, Śiva and Śivā, Bhairava and Bhairavī. So it is equality in five aspects. Along with these the Ācārya shows that the two are equal with regard to the Śeṣa-Śeṣī relationship also.

When we think of Śiva, the Nirguṇa Brahman, as a living entity it means that the body of this life is Ambā, the Saguṇa Brahman. And she is not just the inert body, she pulsates in all parts, in every blood vessel and nerve, from the hair on the head to the nails in the fingers and the toes. In our case [that is of human beings] life departs from our body one day. Such is not the case with the entity mentioned above. The body called Ambā in whom caitanya, life force, prevades throughout, will never depart from it and the living Śivam too will not be separated from it. For Parameśvara Ambā is not only a body but a shield that can never be separated from it, a shield like the one worn by Karṇa.

The cosmos seen outside is like the body seen outside and it will be seen so long as the mind exists. When you sleep, when you are unconscious or when you are in samādhi[g], the mind does not work; the sense organs become inactive. Then what is the body and who is the Śarīrī? Who is the Śeṣa and who is the Śeṣī? Since nothing is known in sleep and in the unconscious state there is nothing dualistic. A jñānin who has reached the state of samādhi and come to the stage of possessing no mind has no cosmos and therefore neither the power nor the entity that conducts it. Also no such thing as the "owner Paramātman" controlling the "property" called the jīvātman (the individual Self). To know the association of two such entities there must be a mind. But the mind has been obliterated. Does the jñānin remain in the state of sleep or unconsciousness? No, it would be wrong to say so. His is not a state of nothingness: it is the state of Oneness [without a second] — this is how the Ācārya establishes non-dualism.

However, he has a lesson for those who are not yet jñānins. His teaching is such as to accustom them to look upon everything including the mind, the five elements and so on as pervaded by Ambā, as imbued with her. It is as a preliminary to this state that he wants them to think of the Brahman as life (a living entity) and Ambā as the body of the cosmos : in other words he means that the jagat or the universe is Ambā.

The Ācārya observes that the cause of dualism, which is the mind, is also Ambā. This is how he begins his next stanza (35).

"Manas-tvam". "Tvam" = you; "manas" = mind. "You exist as the mind."

"Mother, this mind, which is the cause of so much that is false and of so much trouble, is also you."

"Mother, who are you? Where does such a question spring from? Is it not from my mind? That also is you."

When one follows the path of jñāna the mind is erased. But here the question is how to get used to the idea that the mind itself is Ambā. If Ambā is always in your thoughts, the mind will not give room to falsities nor will it invite trouble. Ambā herself will then take you to the state where there is no mind. Such a state is called (in Tamiḷ) "*paraveli*", which means "jñānākāśa".

"We do not see it now?"

"It does not matter. You do see the sky, the vast expanse of the blue sky, don't you? Learn to look upon it also as Ambā. The mind also will unfold itself and become an open expanse like the sky."

"Vyoma tvam". "Tvam" = you; "vyoma" = sky (space).

"Are you only space? The five elements are also you. Next to space is wind, air — that is also you, Mother."

It is because Āñjaneya was born to Marut that he is called "Māruti".

"Marut asi."

"What about Agni (Fire) that is next to Vāyu? It is another aspect of yours. The Vedas themselves proclaim that 'you are the colour of fire, that you glow with ascetic endeavour (tapas)."

"Ṃarut sarāthiḥ asi."

The wind god is the charioteer of fire. Does not fire spread in the direction the wind blows? Since Marut is the charioteer of Agni, we have the term "Marut -sārathi" for Agni, one who has Marut for sārathi.

"Tvam āpaḥ, tvam bhumiḥ."

"You are water. You are also the earth where we live."

In the five cakras of the body from the mūlādhāra to viśuddhi [in the ascending order] Ambā resides in the form of the five elements : pṛthivī to ākāśa. In the cakra next to it she resides as manas (mind). This is mentioned in an earlier stanza (9), beginning with the words, "Mahīm mūlādhāre..."

"Why go on unnecessarily. There is no object in which you are not present. "Tvayi pariṇatāyām na hi param."

"Pariṇatāyām": Amba herself has evolved into all objects, all beings.

I have so far dealt with the first two lines of the stanza (35).

Manastvam vyoma tvam marudasi marutsārathirasi
Tvamāpastvam bhumiḥ tvayi pariṇatāyām na hi param

In the next two lines the Ācārya says: "As the wife of Parameśvara, you have yourself taken the form of the bliss of jñāna for the purpose of evolving into the body of the cosmos.

Tvameva svātmānam pariṇamayitum viśva-vapuṣā
Cidānandākāram Śivayuvatibhāvena vibhṛṣe''

Total realization is sat-cit-ānanda. Śiva does not remain as sat or the Reality alone; he is cit that is consciousness or having awareness and ānanda (that is experiencing bliss). We have been saying from the very beginning that Ambā's function is this, experiencing this Śiva. The term "cidānandalaharī" occurs in an earlier stanza (8). The Ācārya mentions the cause of cit shining and unfolding itself and of ānanda arising and then becoming Śivapatni (wife of Śiva):

"Tvameva svātmānam pariṇamayitum viśva-vapuṣa"

"You must evolve yourself into the cosmic form. It is for this reason that, as Śiva's wife, you have taken the form of cidānanda."

"The Brahman becoming aware of itself and experiencing bliss and remaining by itself is not the end of everything. It acquires cit and ānanda to evolve into the cosmos that is different from itself." What is stated here thus is entirely a Śākta concept and has nothing to do with Advaita. About creation non-dualism says: "It somehow happens because of Māyā. How, why, for what purpose, there is no answer to such questions. One has to accept that it is all the work of Māyā. There is no point in making further inquiries." The Śākta and other devotional systems explain the creation of the cosmos thus. "The one cit, or Great

Awareness, divided itself into many smaller units of awareness and the one Ānanda—the Great Bliss—divided itself into numerous smaller units of bliss. And the purpose of the creation of the cosmos is to watch the sport of the drama conducted with all these. If we think that the drama is real we will be immersed in Māyā and become lost. If we watch the drama with the understanding that in this cosmos of Māyā too there is cidānanda rasa and that the purpose of creation is to derive joy from the drama enacted in sport by Śivayuvatī, the wife of the Sat or the Reality, that is if we too regard the whole thing as sport, drama, as the evolution taking place in Parāśakti's marvellous imagination, we will become steeped in cidānanda and attain oneness with the Reality."

The Ācārya mentions pariṇāma in two places in the stanza. "Tvayi pariṇatāyām na hi param" (there is none other than you to have evolved into the cosmos); "tvameva svātmānam pariṇamayitum viśva-vapuṣā" (for the purpose of evolving yourself into the cosmos). There is no pariṇāma in Advaita. One thing becoming another, like milk turning into curd, is pariṇāma. Advaita does not say that the Brahman changes in this manner. According to it the unchanging Brahman gives the false impression of the cosmos because of Māyā. But Śānkhya believes that the cosmos is the pariṇāma of Prakṛti—not the pariṇāma of Puruṣa. It is this idea that the Ācārya mentions here. He expresses how the Śākta system has given shape to a Śānkhya tenet to suit its own view.

If we conduct research into how far the Ācārya has departed from Advaita in the views expressed in his devotional hymns in consideration of the spiritual advancement of people with different mental attitudes, we will make many interesting discoveries. "Would the Ācārya have done so?" you might ask. One feels like answering the question by saying that "only the Ācārya, who is compassion personified, could have done so."

You will remember that I spoke about "kaulam" in the Śākta system. According to one branch of it there are a number of explanations for the term "Śivayuvatī". "Śivayuvatī" does not mean merely Śiva's wife, "Mrs Śiva". She inheres in herself Śivahood [all that is meant by Śiva] and she is indeed Śivam in the aspect of a yuvatī (young woman). In the *Sahasranāmam* occurs the term "Svādhīnavallabhā" which means "one who keeps her husband under her sway." If we extend this meaning we form the idea that the husband (Śiva) is "contained" in the wife Ambā. "Na hi param": there is none other than she. This remark of the Ācārya about Ambā will be fixed in our minds if we consider the explanation of the name "Śivayuvatī" given above.

Thoughts occur in the mind. But the mind is Ambā. The Ācārya begins his stanza with "manastvam". The mind is the source of all undesirable and harmful thoughts, but if we accustom ourselves to the idea that it is Ambā herself, each one of us will be a king, a king of the empire of the Ātman, Ātmasāmrājya, and fit to perform our own coronation ceremony. We need not turn our mind inward nor suppress it altogether. Even if it is turned outward, turned to the world, we must think that everything is Ambā, all this world of five elements; "marutsārathirasi" ("you are fire"), "everything is you"; "without your evolving yourself there is nothing (tvayi parinatāyām na hi param)." If you thus see that everything is pervaded by Ambā, and if you realise that the mind experiencing all this is also Ambā, you will eventually come to have the same experience as she has of cidānanda in this drama of creation. Our knowledge, which is very little will unite with the knowledge that is great, that is her cit, and our petty pleasures will dissolve in the great Bliss that she is and we will ourselves become the embodiment of cidānanda. Since this denotes the place of the wife of Śiva, each one of us will become Śivayuvatī and attain oneness with him, that is the Brahman. What more do we have to gain?

You will remember what I told you earlier about the Baroḍa University having a palm-leaf manuscript of the *Saundaryalaharī.* In it each stanza of the hymn carries an illustration. A copy of this manuscript is with the Philadelphia Art Museum. The Sanskrit professor of that university (a white) sent photographs of three leaves of the manuscript to his counterpart in Maḍrās University asking for certain clarifications. One of the three palm-leaves carried this stanza, beginning with the words "Manastvam". One would think that a verse expressing abstract ideas cannot be illustrated. But, remarkably enough, there was a picture also accompanying this śloka.

References

[1] From the "Śānti mantra" of the Upaniṣads belonging to the Śukla Yajurveda.

[2] *Durgā-Sūktam,* 2

Chapter 73

Gist of the Two Stanzas

I will now give you the gist of the two stanzas (34 and 35), mentioning points I may have omitted to deal with and ideas I may perhaps have already touched upon.

It is Ambā that is Īśvara's body. And it is not the gross body alone that is meant but also the extremely subtle mind that is in it. The first stanza starts with the gross, "śarīram tvam", and the second with the subtle, "manastvam". We may take it that it is our mind that is referred to—or we may take it that it is the mega-mind or mahat that is referred to, mahat which is the cause of the five elements. From the mind that is the root arises ākāśa or space that is subtle. It becomes increasingly gross, giving rise to air, fire, water and earth. "All these are you (Ambā)," says the Ācārya. "There is no object other than you," he adds. "Tvayi pariṇatāyām na hi param." "Although you are the body of the life or spirit called Śambhu, you have existed without any distinction made between body and spirit. It is you who evolved into the body called viśva or the cosmos'': "Tvam eva svātmānam pariṇamayitum viśvavapuṣā."

Here you find a distinction made between body and spirit as in the Rāmānuja[8] system. However, though there is a suggestion of dualism, everything becomes non-dualistic since in the end "cidānandākāram" is referred to. Even if cit and ānanda are apparently separated from saccidānanda (leaving sat alone), the three together form one. A sweet dish has a form, a smell and a taste. Can we separate one of them from the other two? (For example, can we separate the smell from the taste?) Ambā who is referred to as rooted in jñāna and ānanda is also the non-dual Śat or Reality. Now can the supreme jñāna that is at the root, and the supreme bliss that is also at the root, exist without the basis of Sat? We may say that it is to experience jñāna and ānanda outwardly or for the creatures of the world (Ambā's children) to derive the same experience that she who is one with Śiva exists in the attitude of Śivayuvatī together with her husband Śiva. "Śivayuvatī bhāvena"—which means it is only as a way of thinking that Ambā is "Śivayuvatī". In reality she and Śiva are one. The cosmic body and Ambā, who is its spirit, are one. This Ambā, and Śiva who has made her *like* his body and who is the personification of Sat, are one. It is all non-dual.

Chapter 74

Śiva and Śakti in the Cakras

After the "manastvam" ("the mind is you") stanza, the Ācārya describes how the wife and the husband—Ambā and Śiva—are in the Kuṇḍalinī cakras[8] in which Ambā resides as the tattvas, from manas to pṛthivī (mind to earth).

In each cakra they have each a different name, function and quality. But there is one thing in common, their supreme compassion. In one[1] ("tapana-śaśi-koti-dyuti"), with the radiance of millions of suns and moons, they raise the devotee to the state of liberation which is beyond the sun and the moon and fire, beyond everything. In another[2], remaining as bright as pure crystal, Ambā rains coolness like moonlight and it is the moonlight that dispels the inner darkness of nescience. Like the cakora birds imbibing the rays of the moon, devotees consume these rays. In the third cakra[3], Śiva and Ambā dwell as a pair of haṁsas[8]. Accomplished Advaitins, sannyāsins, jñānins are called "haṁsas", or "paramahaṁsas". The same meaning may be applied here. There is the anāhata cakra in which Praṇava is self-born. Praṇava (Om) is the source of all sound. The Ācārya observes that the conversation of the haṁsa couple constitutes the vidyāsthānas (centres of learning) of the aṣṭādaśa vidya[4], the eighteen branches of learning— the four Vedas, the six Vedāṅgas, the four Upāṅgas and, added to these fourteen, are the four Upavedas. In the eighteen we have all the religious śāstras. The haṁsas need a lake in which to swim. Ordinary haṁsas swim in the Mānasa lake in the Himālaya, but these divine haṁsas swim in the minds (manas) of the great. "Mānasa" means that which is appropriate to the mind. Like the haṁsas imbibing the nectar in lotuses the divine haṁsa pair imbibe the nectar of supreme beatitude from the lotus of jñāna. Haṁsas are said to have this remarkable capacity: if milk diluted with water is kept before them they separate the milk from the mixture and "drink" it. Thus the divine haṁsa pair remove the water representing all the wrongs we have committed and take in the good we have done, regarding it as milk, and bless us. "O they have given us milk," so the divine haṁsa pair will think and, forgetting the wrongs we have committed, give us their blessings. If we have only dirty water to give them (that is if we have done only wrongs) what can they do even though they are compassionate?

Although the husband and the wife perform the same function, in one cakra the two appear to be different. Ambā demonstrates here that she excels Śiva in her compassion "Whatever it be I am Mother. Svāmī will not be compassionate to the same degree as I am." Of the five elements, it is Agni that is associated with this cakra[5] (the cakra referred to above). In this Śiva opens his forehead eye of fire and performs his function of destruction. Then Mother with her "dayārdradṛṣṭi" (with her look made moist and cool with compassion) performs "śaityopacāra" for the world (renders the service of making the world cool). We ask here, "Will Father be equal to Mother?" It is in this context that the Ācārya indulges in a bit of fun by giving Ambā the name of "Samayā". In this fun lies a great truth. The Ācārya demonstrates through the name Samayā that however different Śiva and Ambā may seem to be outwardly, they are equal and one inwardly. Then in another cakra, we see that Śiva himself remains a cloud raining cool[6]. He is the cloud that brings rain to douse the flames of the fire of the deluge so that creation could be started afresh. At this time Ambā is a dazzling streak of lightning in the cloud.

After dealing with Śiva-Śakti in five of the cakras the Ācārya completes the "Ānandalaharī" section of the hymn with a stanza on the mūlādhāra cakra which stands for pṛthivī or earth. Ordinarily, when one deals with the cakras one starts with the mūlādhāra, but here the Ācārya mentions it last. In a sense, the beginning and the end are the same, so it is all non-dualistic. I will now deal with the next stanza (41).

References

[1] Ājñā cakra, Stanza 36 of the *Saundaryalaharī.*

[2] Viśuddhi cakra, Stanza 37.

[3] Anāhata cakra, Stanza 38.

[4] Aṣṭādaśa-vidyā : *Hindu Dharma* deals with all the eighteen branches of learning.

[5] Svādhiṣṭhāna cakra, Stanza 39.

[6] Maṇipūraka cakra, Stanza 40.

Chapter 75

Father and Mother

Tavādhāre mūle saha Samayayā lāsyaparayā
Navātmānam manye navarasa-mahātāṇḍava-naṭam
Ubhābhyām etābhyām udaya-vidhim uddiśya dayayā
Sanāthābhyām jajñe janakajananīmat jagadidam

In this stanza (41) Ambā is adored with Īśvara in the lowermost cakra, that is the mūlādhāra. The stanza (34) beginning with the words, "Śarīram tvam Śambhoḥ", is the first of the ślokas in which the divine couple are mentioned together and in it occurs the term "navātmā", which is used again in the concluding stanza (of the "Ānandalaharī" section). Here it refers to an aspect of Īśvara in the mūlādhāra cakra, that is Ānandabhairava. Since the subject of cakras is completed with this, "navātmā" must be understood as "one with the nine vyūhas" like kāla; it also means that Śiva is the Ātman for the six cakras and the three granthis in them (six plus three, nine in all).

Ambā dwells in this cakra as Ānandabhairavī, the feminine form of Ānandabhairava. Since she is equal to Śiva, the Ācārya uses the name Samayā.

"Tavādhāre mūle": in prose order "tava mūlādhāre", in your mūlādhāra", thus the Ācārya speaks, addressing Ambā. "Samayayā saha" means "with Ānandabhairavī, Samayāmbā". Her characteristic is mentioned: "lāsyaparā". If a man is engaged in one-pointed meditation we refer to him as "dhyānapara". Similarly, "lāsyaparā" means "engaged intensely in lāsya".

"Lāsya" is female dance. It is "lalitā", elegant and graceful. The male dance, which is vigorous, is called "tāṇḍava". Naṭarāja's dance is tāṇḍava and Śivakāmasundarī's is lāsya. In tāṇḍava, the tālavinyāsa called nṛtta and jatibheda and gatibheda are important. In lāsya, bhāva and abhinaya — the enactment of emotions — are important. It is on this basis that dance is divided into masculine and feminine. All this refers to the art of those past times.... Now everything is becoming masculine.

Parameśvara is called "Mahānaṭa" (Mega-dancer, the Great Dancer). Even in the *Amarakośam* we find this name, "Mahākālo Mahānaṭaḥ". If he does not dance there will be no action, no movement, in the world. If it is to perish too he has to perform the "saṁhāra tāṇḍava", the dance of destruction. It is Ambā who stirs him to action, so it has been said in the very first stanza of the hymn. Thus, if he dances so frenetically, it is all her doing. After making him dance uproariously she too joins him and dances gracefully, tenderly. The movements we make with our legs and hands, the vibrations of our blood vessels and nerves, caused by anger, sorrow and desire, all the feelings and emotions that are within us — all these are to be attributed to the dance of this husband-and-wife "team".

Why should our eyes throb when we are sorrowful? Why should our lips quiver when we are angry? Is it not Parameśvara who resides in all of us as Antaryāmin (Inner Controller)? It is because his dance is connected with the nine rasas that our own movements reflecting them are produced. All this belongs to lāsya in which the portrayal of feelings and emotions predominates. There are dances, movements, in nature that betray no feelings. The worlds keep dancing, keep revolving on their own individual axes, around themselves.

The planets keep dancing, revolving, round the sun. The wind blows : it is also a kind of dance. Water rushes down in a flood : and it is also dance. All these dances are tāṇḍava and have no bhāva and are not based on feelings. Even so they produce a variety of bhāvas, feelings, in us; they also create in us rasānubhava, aesthetic experience. When the wind blows gently we feel happy. But when the same wind becomes a gale, a storm or a cyclone, it creates terror. If it affects us, we are hurt, we cry in grief. The moon bathes the world in its light but poets lament that it is the cause of lovers becoming separated. Tāṇḍava and lāsya are connected with each other like Śiva and Śakti.

This is the theme of the stanza. Ānandabhairava and Samayā dance together depicting the nine rasas — he performs the great tāṇḍava and she the lāsya.

In the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam* occurs the name "Maheśvara-mahākalpa-mahātāṇḍava-sākṣiṇī." The reference in this name is to the samhāra tāṇḍava, the dance of destruction, while in this stanza it is to the dance of creation, sṛṣṭi tāṇḍava. When Śiva dances his saṁhāra-tāṇḍava, Ambā merely watches it as a witness (sākṣiṇī) — is she not Mother? In the dance of creation she joins her husband and performs the lāsya dance as her part.

"Sākṣiṇī" : the *Sahasranāmam* mentions that Ambā is a mere witness to Śiva's dance of destruction. But I told you what the Ācārya says in this connection that even during the time of dissolution, when Śiva rises as a great fire and burns everything, Ambā rains her blessings and makes everything cool. It does not mean that she prevents the act of destruction. In the sport of the world it (dissolution) is also a part and it has to be performed. It is for this purpose that Ambā has appointed Rudra as the authority for it. So the cooling she does is like administering anaesthesia before an operation. A military action is carried out after careful planning. Saṁhāra, dissolution, is the operation performed by Rudra.

Then it is creation again. Śiva becomes Ānandabhairava and with the "cooperation" of Ambā as Ānandabhairavī performs the dance of creation.

The Ācārya says: "I meditate on Ānandabhairava and Ānandabhairavī dancing together in the mūlādhāra." Ānandabhairavī is also the name of a (Carṇāṭic) rāga. Here we see its connection with dance also.

When we are joyous we sing and dance. Europeans, men and women, drink and dance ; they perform the ball dance. We who do not know how to be happy, don't we remain glum, blowing our noses? Īśvara and Ambā dance in an ecstasy of joy. Looking at them we must not feel too free about ourselves. That is why with ānanda or joy is mixed "bhairava". "Bhairava" means fearfulness, anger, severity. It is meant to bring us under discipline.

The bhairava mood is temporary, a passing phase. Ānanda is Śiva's permanent characteristic. Great ānanda, great joyousness, is nothing but being kind-hearted, being loving towards all. It is love for all objects of creation. "Dayayā": the word occurs in the third line of the stanza and it means "with compassion".

What do the divine couple do out of their compassion? They create the world. "What kind of compassion is it? Are not all misfortunes, all suffering, caused by the fact of creation? So creation is not an act of kindness but of cruelty," so it would seem to us. But it is not so. Even if the divine couple stop their function of creation now, what about the fact that creation has already been there, that it somehow came into being long, long ago. After one spell of creation there is a rest for all creatures during the deluge. Then comes another spell of creation. You would like to say: "Do not do so again, Lord." I would point out that to think so would be wrong. Seven days make a week, thirty days make a month. Similarly, there is a stipulated length of time, millions and millions of years, for one period of creation. On its conclusion there should necessarily be the deluge. Do all creatures exhaust their karma at the time and do they all deserve liberation? No, they do not. When the deluge occurs everybody has still some karma (effects of karma) to be lived out.

Though, superficially looked at, dissolution seems an act of cruelty, it is in fact an act of kindness. Without any consideration given to the cartloads of karma people have earned for themselves they are freed from birth and given a rest in the name of saṁhara or destruction. This rest is not eternal liberation however prolonged it may be. Eternal release is the result of earning merit and spiritual practice and living out one's karma and in it Īśvara too shows his extra compassion. It means his faith in people, born of his kindness, that they have the capacity to earn merit and become freed from karma. Is it not a matter of pride for the human race? Without realising this and without trying to earn merit, we keep increasing the burden of our karma and keep being born again and again. It is then that, without our deserving mokṣa through our own effort, that the Lord in his kindness gives us a rest through the deluge as a substitute for mokṣa. But karma still sticks to us and is not exhausted. Without living it out how do we obtain the bliss of the Brahman that is eternal liberation? Thus another spell of creation is necessitated and it gives us an opportunity to work out our karma and earn the supreme bliss of liberation. Is it not great compassion on the part of the Lord to give us another such "chance"?

It is in pursuance of this idea that Ānandabhairava and Ānandabhairavī perform the function of creation through their dance.

In this way people are given an opportunity (by being born again) to exhaust their karma and obtain liberation. That is why the Ācārya uses the word "dayayā" in this context, meaning "out of compassion". Since Ānandabhairava and Ānandabhairavī (Śiva and Ambā) are the couple that create the world, the Ācārya calls them Father and Mother and binds us thus to them with the ties of love and affection.

Ubhābhyām etābhyām udayavidhim uddiśya dayayā
Sanāthābhyam jajñe janakajananīmat jagadidam

"Etābhyam ubhābhyām" = by you two who perform the tāṇḍava and lāsya dance; "udayavidhim uddiśya" = with the intention of thinking how the world is to be created again. ("Since you have already carried out the intention," this meaning is suggested. If the Supreme Goddess and Parameśvara intend to do something, it is certainly accomplished at once. There is no need to say the obvious, that it becomes a fact.) "Idam jagat" = this world (that is all its creatures); "janaka-jananī-mat" = "of having father and mother"; "jajne" = so it happens.

"Alas, we are ensnared in creation (by being born in this world). Māyā will shadow us and pull us down." To us who lament thus the Ācārya speaks, comforting us, "Don't be afraid, child. Don't give way to grief." Then he reasons with us: "Why do you think of creation alone. True it is a cause for fear. But remember who created the world. Īśvara and Ambā. As Father and Mother they have created us. Do our parents ever do us harm? It is for our own good that they have done this (created the world and us). If you keep thinking about them — Father and Mother — no evil will ever touch you and you will always be involved in what is good. If you think that you are an orphan, that you are helpless, then alone will you come under the attack of Māyā. Think that you have always Parāśakti with you for your help and protection, Parāśakti herself with Parameśvara as Mother and Father. Māyā then will run away from you. You are not 'anātha', an orphan. You are with those divine parents and so sanātha."

As children we need to have both our parents living; only then do we seem to be "sanātha''. A child has lost its mother but its father lavishes all his care on it. Even so people will speak of it thus: "Poor child, it has no mother. How sad.'' There will be much sympathy for the child. On the other hand, if the child happens to have lost its father but is still well looked after by its mother, the same people will say, "The child is an orphan. It has no father. How sad." "Would it not be enough if we had the Parabrahman to sustain the world, the Parabrahman in some form like Parāśakti or Parameśvara? Why do we speak of Umā together with Maheśvara, similarly, Lakṣmī with Nārāyaṇa, Rādhā with Kṛṣna and Sītā with Rāma? Why do we mention both names? The answer is that, since we are all children, we need both our parents, janaka and janani, father and mother. If either is not there we will feel that we are orphans. We need the protection of both to be called "sanātha".

The word "sanāthābhyām" occurs in the stanza. Ironically enough, it does not refer to us who seem to be "anāthas" but to Svāmī and Ambā themselves, the Lord and Ambā who are our nātha and nāthā. The Ācārya says, "Ubhābhyām etābhyām sanāthābhyām." "By you two who are sanāthas," is the meaning. Does it not mean then that there is a Lord above Īśvara and Ambā to protect them? Is not such an idea strange? A great man has observed : "We are not orphans. We have Īśvara as our guardian. It is he, Īśvara, who is an orphan. There is no Lord over him to protect him. So he is an orphan." The Ācārya speaks reversing the same.

No. It is not that there is someone above them (Īśvara and Ambā) to make them sanāthas. The fact is they are each other's guardians ; they protect each other. There is no Śiva without Śakti; there is no Śakti without Śiva. In one aspect she is Śeṣā and he Śeṣī; in another aspect he is Śeṣa and she Śeṣī. Has not the Ācārya himself said so before? It is all part of their sport. She takes the attitude of being superior to him and saves him when he swallows the Kālakūṭa poison and from the fire of the deluge. And he protects her as the yajamāna (head of the family) when she is in her aspects of Dākṣāyaṇī and Pārvatī and remains submissive to him. The mantra śāstras, the Śivāgamas, the *Tirumantiram*[g] and so on also speak in a conceptual manner of the two guarding each other. Śiva as superior to Śakti, or Śakti as superior to Śiva, protect each other. They are braided together in many relationships. The blessings of the two we must receive as the blessings of the one Paramātman. That is why the two have to be worshipped as Father and Mother. Even then, only when he blesses us will she bless us ; and only when she blesses us will he bless us, so it is said.

Śattan aruḷtarīr śatti aruluṇḍām
Śatti aruḷ tarīr sattan aruluṇḍām
—Tirumantiram, 333.

(*Śattan* = Iśvara with Śakti; *Śatti* = Śakti.)

Parameśvara is called Tāyumānavar: it means that "he also became Mother'', the implication being that Śiva is both Father and Mother. But does it mean that in the temple to him in Malaikoṭṭai (Rock Fort, Tiruci) there is no sanctum for Ambā? There too Ambā is present as Sugandha-Kuntalāṁbikā in a sanctum shaped like the Śrīcakra. I have already spoken about the "Ānandalaharī" verses inscribed in the temple.

The "Ānandalaharī" section of the hymn concludes with the obeisance paid to Father and Mother who give us birth and rebirth and lead us to liberation.

"This world is not to go to rot out of its ignorance. It has its Father and Mother, Parāśakti and Parameśvara, to guard it,'' so saying the Ācārya gives us courage, instils in us enthusiasm. "Janaka-jananī-mat" means "having the character or quality of possessing Mother and Father". For children, this is the ultimate in kinship. The Ācārya dispels all our fears through his words that all people, all of us in this world, have our Father and Mother (we are not orphans).

In between, the Ācārya deals with subjects like Śrīyantra, mantrabīja, Kuṇḍalinī and so on. However, as he completes this section of the hymn, he shows us Father and Mother residing in the mūlādhāra cakra as the mūlādhāra (fundamental support) of everything. They are so easily accessible as to enable us to become devoted to them. Thus the Ācārya gives us his blessings by leaving us as children without any care in their protection. "Ānandalaharī" thus becomes complete in the unalloyed joy of a child having discovered its parents.

Chapter 76

Śiva and Śakti in Different States

That we must always remember Ambā and Svāmī as Father and Mother, holding them tightly in the innermost recesses of our hearts, is the general bhāva or sentiment expressed (so far in the hymn). Within the framework of this idea or attitude the Ācārya has portrayed Ambā and Śiva in various states and in various relationships. If these are added as upa-bhāvas or subsidiary sentiments or moods there will be greater rasa, greater aesthetic delight, to be gained. In a dramatic performance there is what is called the "sthāyī bhāva" that is basic and runs through the whole play. Then there are "sañcārī bhāvas" that arise now and then enhancing the beauty of the main sentiment or theme. In the same way, let us see briefly how Śiva and Ambā are depicted in different ways in the "Ānandalaharī" section of the hymn.

The crest jewel of Ambā's glory is the fact that she activates Father (Śiva) who cannot otherwise even stir. This is the message of the first stanza. In the eyes of the world, Śiva's role is chiefly that of the destroyer but in speaking of this too Ambā's greatness is shown in the next stanza to be such as to arouse our sense of wonder : it is a speck of the dust from her foot that enables Śiva to perform his work of destruction. Here the relationship between the two is the same as that between the Lord and us. In the very first stanza he is mentioned, along with Viṣṇu and Brahmā ("Hari-Hara-Viriñca") among those who worship her. It is very clear that for him she is like God. Some stanzas later (Śloka 7) she is Śiva's "Āhopuruṣikā", that is his awareness of himself, which is more or less in keeping with the idea expressed in the first stanza. In the next stanza (8), she makes him fully her equal in the aspect of Kāmeśvara. She herself as his wife Kāmeśvarī is seated on his lap — the words "Paramaśiva-paryaṅka-nilayam" are used here. The twin manifestations of the Saguṇa Brahman[g], the two are queen-empress and king-emperor and the authorities of the pañcakṛtya functions — *i.e.* with two more functions added to the usual three. In the next stanza (9) she alone is regarded as the Saguṇa Brahman and is absorbed in him, the Nirguṇa Brahman: "sahasrāre padme saha rahasi patyā viharase" ("in the sahasrāra lotus you sport in secret with your husband"). Another stanza (11) mentions how they are together in the Śrīcakra: in it four cakras are his and five hers. She is pativratā supreme, revealing her beauty fully only to her husband. But eleven or twelve stanzas subsequent to this (23), the Ācārya "charge-sheets" Ambā with robbing Śiva's entire body, not satisfied as she is with stealing half of it.

I must speak in some detail about the next stanza (24). In the second stanza the Ācārya refers to Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra performing their respective functions. Here too he deals with the subject : "Jagatsūte dhātā", Brahmā gives birth to this world; "Hariravati", Visnu protects; "Rudraḥ kṣapayate", Rudra destroys. The Ācārya mentions the two remaining of the pañcakṛtya functions and the deities in charge of them. One of the two remaining deities is Īśvara. "Iśastirayati", Īśa does the function of veiling with Māyā. "Īśa" and "Īśvara" are the same, the Lord who rules. As a matter of fact he is only one among the "officers" for the pañcakṛtya. The true yajamānī, mistress, is Parāśakti. It is she who appoints the five officers of her kingdom and makes them work.

"Making them work" does not mean issuing circulars or "memos" or giving oral orders. A mahārājñī would not bother to do such things. It would be enough if she makes a slight sign and the office would start working with alacrity. She flickers her brows for a moment, her brows which are like creepers, "kṣaṇacalitayoḥ bhrūlatikayoḥ". Taking it for her command, "ajñāmālaṁbya", the pañcakṛtya deities hasten to perform their functions.

In spite of all the pomp and circumstance of royalty, her position here is a notch lower than what it is as described in the first stanza in which she is said to be worshipped even by the Trimūrti. There she is the Supreme Being and the Trimūrti and other gods are her devotees. Here, great queen though she is, kowtowed to even by the same deities, the relationship between them is that of a ruler and her attendants or servants. Is not the position of the Supreme Being worshipped by devotees superior to that of a queen served by her courtiers and attendants?

One such attendant is Īśvara who is in charge of tirodhāna or veiling. The name "Īśvara" suggests that he is a big deity. "Am I not the one who performs the function of keeping the entire world with the Trimūrti bound to Māyā?" so he must be feeling and that is why his name is such as to suggest that he is an important deity. "Tiraskurvan etat," that he brings even the Trimūrti under Māyā is mentioned in the stanza. Moreover, not aware of what he does, he veils himself with the power of Māyā, conceals himself — "svamapi vapuḥ Īśastirayati."

The power and ability he possesses are Ambā's gift. She indeed is true Īśvarī. There is no justification for Īśvara to call himself by the name. But Ambā in her magnanimity has let him do so.

Of the five "officials" [of pañcakṛtya] we have seen only four and one more remains. The fifth "official" performs the function of granting blessings (anugraha). "After seeing the example of Īśvara, is he going to adopt a name to suggest that he is a step even higher?" so Ambā thought. "He may adopt a name that shows he is superior even to me. There is nothing higher than I. If there is anyone equal to me it is Śiva, my husband, and we two are above all those performing the five functions. I wonder whether the fifth official is going to have his (that is Śiva's) name?" So she called him, the fifth official, and said to him, "Listen, choose a name for yourself. But make sure that it is not a name of Śiva."

There was a Vaiṣṇava landowner who was very devoted to Perumāḷ [meaning here Viṣṇu or a Vaiṣṇava deity]. One of the labourers working on his farm was an "untouchable".

The landowner one day asked him : "What's your name, man?"

"Perumāḷu," replied the labourer.

The landowner wondered how he could call his servant "Perumāḷ" and asked him to change his name.

The man said that it was not easy to do it. He had to approach the village headman's office, pay a fee, and then sacrifice a goat or fowl to his god. All this would cost a pretty sum. The landowner agreed to pay all the expenses and gave him the cash needed. All he wanted was that he should not be put in the position of calling his servant "Perumāḷ".

When the labourer returned after having changed his name, the landowner asked him : "What's your new name?" "Pedda Perumāḷ," was the reply.

"*Pedda*" in Telugu means "big". So "Pedda Perumāḷ" means "Big Perumāḷ."

There is a saying: "After Perumāḷ, Pedda Perumāḷ."

In the language of [Tamil] Vaiṣṇavas the term *"Perumāḷ kovil"* means or stands for Kāñcīpuram. The word *"Kovil"* alone signifies Śrīraṅgam. But Vaiṣṇavas call Śrī Raṅganātha (the deity of Śrīraṅgam) *"Periya Perumāḷ"* (*"Periya"* is Tamiḷ for "big".) There is a reference in the *Tiruppugazh*[g] to this deity, *"Periya Perumāḷ Arangara." "Periya Perumāḷ"* and *"Pedda Perumāḷ"* are the same. The Tamiḷ land was for long under Telugu rule, so many Telugu words came into use in Tamiḷ. *"Pedda"* is one such word.

I have told the story in the context of Ambā asking the "official" in charge of anugraha or blessings to call himself by a name other than that of "Śiva".

The Ācārya mentions the name this "official" gave himself: "Sadāpūrvaśiva", meaning "Śiva with the prefix Sadā", that is "Sadāśiva." But why does the Ācārya, instead of stating simply "Sadāśiva", say "Śiva with the prefix Sadā"? Out of mischief! [Or a sense of fun.] Ambā is *Amma*, Mother, and there is a certain charm in teasing her about some matter or other. She had asked the "official" in charge of blessings to choose for himself a name other than Śiva. But what did he do? He deceived Ambā by choosing the name Sadāśiva, not plain Śiva, but Sadāśiva, that is "Always Śiva". And when one is Always Siva how can the name be changed? The Ācārya wanted to tell the story of how Ambā was tricked and give it a mischievous twist. He wanted to tell it in a subtle and oblique manner so that the reader would be left wondering about "how it could be like this" [the reference is to the term the Acarya uses, "Sadā-pūrva-Śiva" instead of simply "Sadāśiva"]. His idea was that the reader should be made to find an explanation for it himself. That would give the story added literary flavour and make a deep impression on the minds of readers. The Ācārya mentions the names of the pañcakṛtya "officials" one by one and, as he comes to the one in charge of blessings... If the name of Sadāśiva were mentioned matter-of-factly it would not make any impression on the minds of readers and so he uses the term "Sadā-pūrva-Śiva" in order to rivet the attention of readers on the name. With their attention specially drawn to the name they would inquire into its meaning and would find out for themselves how Ambā was tricked by the "official" in charge of blessings [that is the one who chose to call himself Sadāśiva].

What I wished to tell you was the various ways in which the relationship between Ambā and Svāmī are expressed. Here (in Stanza 24) the Ācārya mentions that Ambā is the yajamānī or mistress of Śiva in his forms of Rudra (one of the Trinity), Īśvara and Sadāśiva who became her attendants. In the next stanza he expresses the common belief that the Trimurti who perform the three functions (creation, sustenance and dissolution) represent the three guṇas (sattva, rajas and tamas)[8]. He takes up this idea found in the first stanza and says : "To worship you is to worship them also because their heads are placed at your feet. Keeping their hands folded above their heads they prostrate themselves at your feet. Those folded hands are like flowers placed at your feet. The flowers offered at your feet will also fall on those flowers (hands of the Trimūrti). So the puja performed to your feet is pūjā performed to the heads and hands of the Trimūrti." Thus the worshippers (the Trimūrti) become the worshipped. Here too Rudra, an aspect of Śiva, is a devotee of Ambā, and she is in the relation of the Supreme Being for him.

We may speak of Śiva as her child also. This is how it is ...

"Trayāṇām devānām triguṇa janitānām tava Śive," says the Ācārya. He uses the word "Śiva" significantly. The *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* speaks of "Śivam caturtham". "Caturatham" is the state of the Brahman which is beyond the three guṇas and it is called "turīya". When the Brahman is Śivam it is quiescent, without any function, and when it is Śiva it is functioning. "Śivam" is not attached to the three guṇas. It is the citśakti, the power of consciousness, and it arises as icchā or desire and becomes Kameśvari to generate the three guṇas. The three deities who perform the three functions (creation, sustenance and dissolution) are also generated from these guṇas. "Tava triguṇa janitānām"— "the Trimūrti are born of your three guṇas", which means born of her. She is the jananī, mother, of the Trimūrti. As a philosophical concept also Ambā is regarded as the Mother of Svāmī, Śiva. Even those who find philosophical concepts hard to understand will find this easy : "the three guṇas are born of the root or fundamental force, aren't they? The three mūrtis (Trimūrti) are their embodiment. The root force then must be Mother, is it not so?"

[There is a smile on the Great Guru's face as he continues...] We may even say that Ambā is the grandmother of the Trimūrti. Many have spoken of her as Mother. What nobody has said I am telling you. It will seem to be something novel. The three guṇas were first born as the offspring of the Turīya-Parāśakti. And the Trimūrti are born of those three guṇas;[g] as the Ācārya says, "triguṇa-janitānām". So does it not mean that they are Ambā's grandchildren? Thus there is this relationship also between Rudra-Śiva and Ambā.

In the next stanza (26) it is mentioned that, when all deities perish during the great deluge, Śiva keeps sporting with Ambā. The pañcakṛtya deities also perish during this time. Saṁhāra-Rudra (the Rudra responsible for the dissolution), also perishes: it is the great saṁhāṛa in which the Saṁhāra-Rudra also comes to an end. This is brought about directly by Parāśakti. It is the time when she puts a stop to her sport and brings to an end the dualistic cosmos. Where is the room or need now for the function of veiling or of granting blessings. So those regarded as equal to Śiva (Rudra, Maheśvara and Sadāśiva) are also to perish. The Pañcabrahmāsana of Ambā is also called the Pañcapretāsana. It is she who appoints the five deities and gives them the power to carry out their duties. If she does not do so they are like pretas, corpses; hence the name "Pañcapretāsana", which term I have already explained to you. I don't know whether you remember it. The time of the great destruction is the time when the five "officials" are not given any duties to perform. "Śivākāre mañce Paramaśiva paryaṅka nilayam" — this line occurs in an earlier stanza (8). On the Pañcabrahmāsana or Pañcapretāsana Paramaśiva keeps Ambā on his lap. The Kāmeśvara referred to here is the same as the Paramaśiva figuring in the above-mentioned stanza. The Ācārya shows the two as a couple happily sporting together (Stanza 26). Why should they be happy now, what joy do they find in saṁhāra or destruction? Although outwardly dissolution appears to be an act of cruelty, it is actually an act of kindness since, through it, Kāmeśvara and Kāmeśvarī free all creatures, millions and trillions of their children, from karma and draw them unto themselves. Is it not a matter for joy?

An idea occurs to me now. The Ācārya says, addressing Ambā, "Mahā saṁhāre'smin viharati Sati tvatpatirasau": "during the time of the great destruction your husband sports." "Viharaṇa" means delighting oneself in sport, sporting together. It is in this sense that I spoke to you so far about the word. This word "viharaṇa" itself has the meaning of saṁhāra, destruction. "Haraṇa", "apaharaṇa", "saṁharaṇa", "viharaṇa", "apahāra", ''vihāra'', all these words could be used as synonyms for saṁhāra. It seems to me that the words "tvatpatiḥ viharati" could be taken to mean that Kāmeśvara alone, without being associated with Kāmeśvarī, performs the mahā-saṁhāra. There are no words in the stanza to suggest that he performs the sport of dissolution with Ambā, nor is there reason to believe that he sports with Ambā — there is no reference to any dissolution. The words only mean that "during the mahā-saṁhāra your husband performs viharaṇa" : "mahāsaṁhārésmin viharati Sati tvatpatirasau." So there is plenty of room to construe the line to mean that it is he, Kāmeśvara, who performs the great destruction.

If I interpret the stanza thus it is only to speak in favour of Ambā, to see that she gets a good name! "What appears outwardly as an act of cruelty, the great dissolution, is not performed by her. Although the arrangement is hers, the execution is not, not the Mother's. After all, it is the execution that is apparently cruel. So far, Kāmeśvara has been a king only in name, but in bringing about the end of creation he receives the necessary authority. If I interpreted the stanza in the way I did, it was to show that it was he who carried out the destruction. My intention was that Ambā should thereby earn a good name. I have in this matter the support of the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam.* So nobody can complain that I have interpreted the stanza the way I like. What does the *Sahasranāmam* say in this context? "Maheśvara-mahakalpa-mahātāṇḍava-sākṣiṇī." "Mahakalpa-mahātāṇḍava" may be taken to mean the great dance of Maheśvara at the time of the deluge following the completion of so many kalpas[8]. Or we may take it to mean the great dance of the deluge, "planned" by Maheśvara. "Kalpana" is not what we take it to mean, "imagination". It is something done after careful planning. So we may take it that it is Maheśvara himself who creates the great deluge. Also he is not to be understood here as the deity of tirodhāna or veiling. In this context such a meaning is not appropriate. The name means one who is great and lordly. "Maheśvara-mahātāṇḍava-sākṣiṇī" thus means that Ambā is a mere witness to Maheśvara sporting during the great deluge.

Altogether this is a new and interesting relationship between Ambā and Iśvara, contrary to the generally understood one. What is generally believed to be the relationship between the two? Ambā is the one who functions and he is a mere witness, the embodiment of the Self. Here he is the active power and she the passive witness.

Of the three functions (creation, sustenance, destruction), Rudra performs destruction. Ironically enough, during his act of destruction he himself is destroyed. Then, with regard to the five functions, pañcakṛtya, Śiva is the functioning power, Ambā being a mere witness. This we know from the great Cidaṁbaram temple, the foremost among Śaiva shrines. Naṭarāja it is who performs the five functions through his pañcakṛtya-paramānanda-tāṇḍava[g]. He is indeed rājā, a sovereign monarch, and he keeps dancing away as an awesome exercise encompassing everything. Parāśakti, with her power withdrawn, remains serene and almost obscure. All the importance here is Naṭarāja's and the god is referred to here as *"Ayya"*. The opposite is the case in Mad(h)urai (at the Mīnākṣī temple) where it is all *"Amma"*. She is the first to be offered pūjā, and naivedya[g] and he (Sundareśvara) is in the background. "Is it Cidaṁbaram or Madurai here?" we often hear this question asked, the purpose of which is to find out who manages the household, ["who is the boss?"] the wife or the husband.

I was speaking about the various types of relationship existing between Śiva and Ambā as described in the *Saundaryalaharī*. In it a view contrary to the generally held opinion is found, that is of Śiva performing the function of dissolution and Ambā being a mere witness to it : he is actor and she is spectator. This is suggested by the words, "mahā-saṁhāre'smin viharati Sati tvatpatirasau."

In another place the Ācārya says that Ambā sports with her husband, "patyā viharase" (Stanza 9)

"Sahasrāre padme saha rahasi patyā viharase."

When a yogin rouses his Kuṇḍalinī power, cakra after cakra, from the mūlādhāra upward to the crown of his head, the Śakti that is Ambā will be manifested completely and Devī will sport with her husband (in the sahasrāra lotus). That is what the Ācārya tells us, that Śiva and Śakti become united here—and it is the final stage of involution. With it the jīvātman and the Paramātman become one and liberation is achieved. In this way, without seeming to be cruel like in the act of destruction (saṁhāra) even outwardly, the Mother, full of joy, pours amṛta (into the devotee's being) and then this amṛta instead of being a flow becomes an experience (for the devotee-yogin) and he himself becomes amṛta, that is he becomes immortal. It is at this time that the Mother, full of love, is said to indulge in sport. We may take it that the Ācārya has spoken of Śivam sporting at the time of destruction.

The relationship between Śiva and Ambā is also that between guru and śiṣya. Śiva is the guru and Ambā the disciple. He teaches her the ways of worship known as the Āgamas, the Tantras and the Saṁhitās. She is Jñānāṁbikā hereslf, the goddess of jñāna, but it is to proclaim to the world the importance of vidyā or learning, to make known that her husband is guru to a woman, that she receives instruction from Śiva. This relationship is also dealt with in the *Saundaryalaharī* (Stanza 31). There are said to be 64 tantras. The subject is not mentioned in a direct manner. Stating everything in a novel way is a speciality of the *Saundaryalaharī.* The Ācārya speaks thus, addressing Ambā: "The Svāmī taught all the 64 tantras[1], making one perfect in each and afterwards he kept silent. You saw it and thought to yourself, 'How is it that, after teaching our children all the 64 tantras, each yielding a particular fruit, he has not instructed them in the tantra of Śrīvidyopāsanā, the Samayācāra Tantra, which yields all fruits including dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa? Though they do bring benefits in the spheres of dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa, its chief value is that it translates all external pūjā into inward worship and paves the way of the devotee to Self-realisation by making the inner organs (antaḥ-karaṇas) absorbed in the Ātman. He has locked up the tantra without revealing it to children [all of us] and sealed his mouth himself. How unjust it is." Then she compelled Śiva to teach their children her tantra. (So the Ācārya states in Stanza 31.) He uses the word "nirbandha" in this context: "punastvannirbandhād..." ("Nirbandha" means compulsion. Ambā compelled Śiva to teach the Śrīvidyā tantra.)

Śiva, who had remained rooted in his own state of Brahman was drawn into sport by Ambā. And then he was deeply involved in it. No other entity had been so still as he had been and now he executes a dance that makes the whole cosmos vibrate, tremble : it is the dance of joy. It is the pañcakṛtya-paramānanda-tāṇḍava[g]. The saṁhāra tāṇḍava (dance of destruction) is different: it is also a dance to which the Mahā-Parāśakti is a mere witness. There are seven types of dance : ajapā, kukkuṭa and so on. Apart from these there are nine other types called Navatāṇḍava, dances of great vigour and power, almost uproarious. In addition, there are many other sports of his: bhikṣāṭana (wandering as a mendicant), Tripura-dahana (the burning of Tripura), the slaying of Jalandhara. For the 64 kinds of sport he manifests himself in 64 aspects. In the city of Mad(h)urai alone he has shown himself engaged in these 64 kinds of sport. He indulges in all these sports and, without allowing people to become freed from their own sport, from the dualistic world, and advance to the state of liberation, he stops with teaching the 64 tantras that yield varied benefits (but not final release).

It was then that, in her supreme compassion, the Mother said to Paramaśiva: "Keep dancing, Śvāmi. But can my children do the same? Even if they are made to dance, you must make their dance (all their worldly activities) a way to the undoing of their karma and an aid to the purification of their consciousness. And then you must lead them to the path of jñāna and open to them the gateway to my worship which will in the end make them still and quiescent.'' [The Mahāsvāmi raises his voice and speaks the words of Ambā...] "Will you do it? I will not leave you without your doing it.'' Thus she compelled her husband to teach the world the Śrīvidyā tantra. He had kept it under lock and key, so to speak, because he was reluctant to impart such a great work as "Ambā Tantra'' to an unregenerate world. But because of Ambā's persistence he had no choice but to teach the world that tantra also.

Though it is a discipline that deals with her own worship, she did not want to reveal it to the world herself and wanted her husband and guru to do it. This showed her pātivratya[g] and devotion as a wife and disciple, but in her anxiety that all of us her children must obtain that supreme means of liberation, she departed from her duty as a pativratā and disciple and used compulsion to make her husband reveal the tantra to the world. Here she demonstrates that, above her duty as wife and disciple, is her affection as a Mother for her children.

Among the many distinguishing features of the Samayā (Śrīvidyā) Tantra is this : it closely follows the Vedic tradition. All tantras are "adapted"to the Vedic way. It is also wrong to speak separately of the two ways or mārgas, the Vedic and the tāntrik. However there are many customs in the tāntras that are not entirely Vedic and are said to be different from the Vedic discipline. It was our Ācārya who established the Vedic mode of worship in its pristine form and with all its vitality. In the Vedic pūjā also mantras used in tāntrik worship form a part. If there are mantras like Śiva-pañcākṣarī that are clearly mentioned in the Vedas there are others that are not so explicitly stated but all the same hinted at or indicated in the Vedic texts. Thus when the Ācārya wanted to establish the Vedic mode of worship in Śrīvidyopāsanā he relied on Samayācāra for it.

The Ācārya calls it Ambā's own tantra: "te tantram". He says : "You compelled Śiva to reveal the tantra to the world, and you succeeded in your efforts. The irony of it is that in many of the ways in which Ambā is worshipped, Śiva's place is secondary to her own or even inferior to hers. It is in Samayācāra, which is regarded as "Ambā's own tantra", that the two have equal importance. That Ambā does not accept as her own those tantras in which she is accorded a more exalted place than Śiva and accepts as hers tantras that regard her and her husband as equal shows her pātivratya.

Śiva, equal in importance to her as her husband; a husband only in name; Śiva, her guru or official appointed by her (and subservient to her); her dāsa, devotee, son (I have extended the relationship to that of grandson); she half his body; she also takes (or steals) all his body; she is protection for Śiva's very life. In this "Ānandalaharī" section are mentioned Śiva and the deities who are equivalent to him and their relations with Ambā are depicted in various ways.

However, the most important feature of this section is the Śrīvidyā tantra. Two mantras occurring in the tantra are also seen here. Some believe that the two stanzas (32 and 33) constitute the life-breath of this section ("Ānandalaharī"). If the latter part of the hymn is devoted to a depiction of Ambā's physical traits, this part presents her in the "akṣara-svarūpa" (as an embodiment of letters). In the sense that deities have two forms, physical or bodily form and sound form, the latter part of the hymn represents the physical form and this (the first part) represents the sound form. The one is the dṛśyarūpa, seen with the eye; the other is the śravyarūpa, perceived by the ear. The superiority of the śabdarūpa or sound form is this: it is from the sound form that the physical form came into being. The sound form is elevated over the other form in that if you recite the verses that express her sound form her physical form will make its presence felt before us.

If we can come by the physical form through the sound form, it means the sound form is a means to obtain the physical form. The physical form is thus the goal and in that respect superior to the other form. If we say that the physical form arises from the sound form, it means it is the fruit yielded by the sound form and in this way also superior to the other. I don't know what I will say on other occasions. When we take up the section called "Saundaryalaharī" the beauty of Ambā's physical form earns full marks.

As the Ācārya concludes the first section, after dealing with various philosophical concepts, he brings before us the universal Father and Mother—Janaka (Father) and then Jananī (Mother). In that Mother, all tantras and all truths find their fulfilment. A child first recognises its mother's face, its mother's form. There are so many colours in nature, green, red, and so on. A child is happy to see these colours. But the happiness it derives from looking at its mother's face is far more. So, after finally speaking of the Jagajjananī, the Universal Mother, the Ācārya keeps aside all philosophical concepts and commences his depiction of Mother, from her head to her feet.

It is here that the "Saundaryalaharī" section begins, the Ācārya's portrayal of Ambā, the section in which we see Ambā's beauty flowing as a flood, wave after wave.

Note

1 In ways of worship, as generally understood, what pertains to Śiva is called Āgama, what pertains to Ambā is known as Tantra, and what pertains to Viṣṇu is known as Saṁhitā.

Chapter 77

Candra-Sūrya-Maulīśvarī

Right at the start of the "Saundaryalaharī" section, in describing Ambā's crown, the Ācārya pours out his ideas born of his unique imagination, ideas that touch the heights of poetry. We see poetic fancy and the flow of words that combine majesty with sweetness, the effulgence of the incandescent sun and the cool of the radiant moon. The stanza (42) performs the function of adorning Amba's head with the sun and the moon.

Gatair-māṇikyatvam gaganamaṇibhiḥ sāndraghaṭitam
Kirīṭam te haimam Himagirisute kīrtayati yaḥ
Sa nīḍeyacchāyācchuraṇa-śabalam candra-śakalam
Dhanuḥ śaunāsīram kimiti na nibadhnāti dhiṣaṇām

A style in which the words come like the current of a stream, or like a flow of honey, a style in which enchanting ideas are expressed in simple and elegant words, is called "Vaidarbhī rīti" (Vaidarbhī style) in Sanskrit. In early times poets in that area [Vidarbha, now part of Mahārāṣṭra] must have been proficient in that style. "Gaudī rīti" is the style that must have originated in Gauḍadeśa or Beṅgāḷ. The writing in this style is somewhat pompous and is not easily understood. In the *Saundaryalaharī* there is a mixture of the two styles. In the previous stanza Ambā was brought close to us (as an affectionate Mother with whom we are familiar). Now with the commencement of the second part of the hymn, the style is somewhat grandiose because the Ācārya is anxious that the majesty and greatness of Ambā must not go unnoticed. The ideas expressed are also complex. The beginning of the section thus suggests the waves coming in a rush.

Just as the Gaṅgā which, tumbling down from the celestial world, became placid after it had been caught in the matted locks of Śiva, the Ācārya's poetic style becomes more serene after the grand manner in which he depicts Ambā's head or crown (in the opening stanza).

I said Ambā's head was adorned by the sun and the moon. That she is Candraśekharī was mentioned earlier. The idea that she is also Sūryaśekharī is new. And it is not just one sun that adorns her head but twelve suns.

Śiva who is well known as Candraśekhara is also called Sūryaśekhara. Bhānuśekhara — nowadays the name appears as "Bhānuśekhar" — also means the same. In many Śiva temples the rays of the rising sun fall on the head of the liṅga: Śiva thus may be said to be Sūryaśekhara.

There are two Śiva temples in Tañjāvūr district and they are called *"Talaiñayiru"* [meaning, literally, "Sun on the Head"]. One is to the west of Vaidīśvaran *Kovil*. In the *Tevaram*[g] it is referred to as "Karuppariyalūr". The second *"Talaiñayiru"* is in the Tirutturaipuṅdi tālūqa. It is because the sun's rays fall on the Śivaliṅga that these temples have the name of *"Talaiñayiru"*, so it is said.

The word "nabhomaṇi" or "gaganamaṇi" means a jewel in the sky. "Gaganamaṇi" appears here in its plural form as "Gaganamaṇibhiḥ".

The sun round which our earth and other planets revolve is one among many. There are not only many suns other than our own but also many galaxies other than ours. The śāstras speak of "Dvādaśādityas", twelve suns. The Ācārya says that the crown of Ambā, who is the creator of the cosmos, is encrusted with the twelve suns. "Sāndram ghaṭitam" means "closely set". The first line of the stanza thus speaks of Ambā being "Sūryaśekharī".

The stanza describing Ambā begins in a dazzling manner (with reference to the sun) but in the second line, in contrast to the warmth and effulgence suggested by it, is the pleasant coolness denoted by the name "Himagirisute".

Since Ambā has been described first as Kāmeśvarī, a lustrous red in colour like a thousand rising suns, the Ācārya now calls her Pārvatī, daughter of the mountain of snow, so green and fresh to look at (and therefore cool to the eye). Towards the end of the hymn (in Stanza 96) the Ācārya addressing Satī—Pārvatī's previous incarnation as daughter of Dakṣa—says: "Tava Sati satīnām acarame." Satī (Ambā) offers her body in the fire of the sacrifice performed by Dakṣa. Instead of being reduced to ashes, she is born as Pārvatī possessing the colour of green which colour represents the very substance of life. From the mound of fire she went directly to the mountain of snow and took the form of tender green. During the debate Jñānasaṁbandhar had with the Jainas, the palm-leaf on which his *Tevāram*[8] hymn was inscribed was put in the fire but instead of being burned it remained fresh: it was similar to how Satī became Pārvatī. After suggesting the heat of the sun in the earlier line, the Ācārya creates coolness by addressing Ambā as the daughter of the mountain of snow. The feeling of coolness is further enhanced when he brings in "candra-śakalam", the crescent moon, which pours out its cool nectarine rays.

Ambā's crown, which has the crescent moon, is made of gold, "haiman kirīṭam". "Hemam" means gold; "haimam" is that which is made of gold, or golden. "Himam" also means snow. Ambā is "Himagirisutā", daughter of the mountain of snow. In the *Kenopaniṣad,* Ambā appears as the embodiment of Brahmavidyā to teach Indra. There she is referred to as "Haimavatī". The Ācārya uses the word in two senses: as the daughter of the mountain of snow and as one possessing the brightness of gold. Here, in this verse of the "Saundaryalaharī" section, intending to allude to Ambā's connection with the Upaniṣads, he mentions both "Himagiri" and "Hemam". Not only that. In the *Kenopaniṣad* Ambā teaches Indra Brahmavidyā ; here Indra's bow is mentioned, that is Indradhanus, the rainbow — "dhanuḥ Śaunāsīram".

The words "haimam-hima" occur consecutively (in the second line); in the next line we have "śabalam (candra) śakalam". Alliterations abound in the hymn.

Ambā's crown which is encrusted with suns for rubies has the crescent moon on it. The moon is far smaller than the sun. But here it is mentioned that the suns studding the crown are small stones, while the crescent moon adorning the same crown is much bigger, like a slice of ash-gourd. The moon exudes both nectar and snow (coolness). Here we have the word "himakaraḥ", one who creates snow, coolness.. Four or five stanzas subsequently (46) occurs the words "rākā-himakaraḥ" that is the full moon, but here the reference is to the crescent moon, that of the third day of the bright half of the month, and it is shaped like a bow. Its light is scattered as snowfall. The glow of the rubies that are the suns falls on the moonlight, "nīḍeyacchāyā": "nīḍa" means a crown shaped like a bird's nest. The radiance of the jewels falling on it means the light of the sun. What happens when sunlight falls on a raincloud? A rainbow is formed, is it not? There is nothing more beautiful in nature than a rainbow with its seven colours. When the light of the gems that are the suns on Ambā's crown gild the moonlight there is refraction resulting in the seven colours: the idea is that the crescent moon is made to look like a rainbow.

"The moon is a satellite and not self-luminous. Moonlight is produced by sunlight falling on it.'' This is the lesson of science. The lesson of poetry is different. When sunlight falls on the self-luminous moon a rainbow is created and there is a magical display of colours. The great poet that the Ācārya is, he has displayed creative imagination of a high order by pointing to the rainbow that is the crescent moon on Ambikā's head. You keep looking at the rainbow again and again and its beauty and the sense of coolness it gives you is such that you can never be satiated by it. Though the idea is great, the Ācārya himself does not think that it has occurred to him alone. For he asks: "Who cannot but liken it to the rainbow, the wonderful colours created by the lustre of the jewels on your crown falling on the crescent moon?" "Śaunāsīram dhanuḥ iti dhiṣaṇām kim na nibadhnāti" : the words of the fourth line of the stanza in prose order. "How can this idea of the rainbow (the light of the suns on the crown of Ambā falling on the light of the crescent moon) not be included in poetry?" "Yaḥ kīrtayati" in the second line means "whoever describes". The Ācārya observes that any poet, great or ordinary, cannot but express such an idea (comparison with the rainbow) in his poem. At the very start of the "Saundaryalaharī" section of the hymn the Ācārya shows his humility, a characteristic of his that we see throughout.

Indra is the presiding deity of rain. Thunder is caused by his wielding his vajrāyudha [thunderbolt, adamantine weapon]. His bow is the rainbow, "Indradhanus". "Śaunāsīram dhanuḥ" means the same. Indra came to be called "Śunāsīra" from the fact that he always fights standing in front of his army. The name is included in the *Amarakośam*.

All this creation and its activities, which are the result of Parāśakti's appearance from the Nirguṇa Brahman[8], may be compared to the many colours formed by the refraction of white light. The idea occurs in the very first stanza that depicts the beauty of Ambā.

We may take it that what is said in the stanza is not refraction but reflection. The light of the suns (on Ambā's crown), impinging upon the crescent moon, must have divided itself into many colours in the dewdrops oozing from it (from the crescent moon). It is also likely that the many suns are many colours and that their light reflected by the crescent moon produces a rainbow.

Thus in the very first stanza of the section devoted to a depiction of Ambā's physical form, the Ācārya points to the sun and the moon on her head — the sun and the moon that provide sustenance to the entire world — and brings the goddess face to face with us, for our *darshan*, as Candra-sūrya-maulīśvarī. She wears the crown as the queen-empress of all the three worlds and has the sun and the moon on that very crown.

Ambā appears before us thus in all her regal splendour. But even as the queen that she is, one is reminded, as mentioned in an earlier stanza (34), of her motherly quality. In that stanza the Ācārya says that she suckles the world with her breasts of the sun and the moon: "śaśi-mihira-vakṣoruhayugam."

Although a number of suns are mentioned here, instead of just one, the moon has greater importance since they (the suns) shed their light on it. In other words, what is of significance is the fact that the World Mother is revealed to us as Candramaulīśvarī (the goddess with the moon on her crown).

The five liṅgas that the Ācārya received from Īśvara have a common name : each is called "Candramaulīśvara". I have already told you the story that the *Saundaryalaharī* was obtained by him at the same time and that Nandikeśvara snatched away from him a part of the text. I further said that the Ācārya completed the hymn by composing the missing part himself (the part snatched away by Nandikeśvara), that is from the 42nd to the 100th stanza. I observed, besides, that just as Candramaulīśvara is Īśvara's own form, the *Saundaryalaharī* is Ambā in hymnal form. So it is extremely appropriate that the opening stanza (of the second part of the hymn) describes her as Candramaulīśvarī.

Chapter 78

The Black that Dispels Darkness

The Ācārya's description of Ambā's crown [he begins the previous stanza with it] is itself like a stream of light illumining the cosmos. But, as he goes further in the stanza, he gives the impression of wearing "cooling" glasses [sun glasses] by mentioning the mountain of snow, the cool moon and concluding with the rainbow that comes with the season of rains. In the next stanza (43) there is a total change and it is devoted to a description of Ambā's utterly black tresses of hair.

Dhunotu dhvāntam nastulita-dalitendīvara-vanam
Ghanasnigdha-ślakṣṇam cikura-nikurṁabam tava Śive
Yadīyam saurabhyam sahajam upalabdhum sumanaso
Vasantyasmin manye valamathana-vāṭī-viṭapinām

The Ācārya addresses Ambā as "Sive", that is by her highly auspicious name. "Dhvāntam dhunotu" means, "May it dispel darkness."

"The crown has been described by the Ācārya as being all radiance. From where does darkness come now?"

The reference here is not to outward but to inner darkness, to ajñāna or nescience that keeps everybody in a whirl. In one of the earlier stanzas (3) he refers to this darkness, "avidyānām antastimiram".

"Dhunotu dhvāntam naḥ": "nah" means our(s). The Ācārya prays on behalf of all of us saying, "May the darkness of the nescience of all of us be dispelled." As for him, he was the light of jñāna. Even a shadow of ignorance would not cross him. But he prays for all of us; he prays with us. In this stanza he starts by saying, "Dhunotu dhvāntam naḥ" (May all our nescience be dispelled.) And the next stanza he starts by saying, "Tanotu kṣemam naḥ" ("May all of us be granted well-being".)

"How, according to the Ācārya, is the darkness of nescience to be dispelled? Is it by Ambā's radiant form? No.'' The answer is in the second line of the verse: "Tava cikura nikuruṁbam". "Tava" means "your" that is Ambā's; "cikuram" is "hair"; "nikuruṁbam" is a dense mass of any object. So "cikura-nikuruṁbam" means densely grown tresses of hair. The Ācārya says that Ambā's tresses of black hair must dispel our darkness.

Hair itself is dark. So does it not create darkness? Ambā must have appeared even before Time but it would be wrong to think for that reason that her hair must be white because she is aged and that for that reason it would dispel darkness. But the fact is the celestials do not age and Ambā is the queen-empress of all celestials. How can she ever age?

She does not have the body of the middle-aged. Though she is the mother of all the worlds, physically she still looks a girl-child, a kanyā, so tender and delicate is her body. "Mother[1], you have given birth to millions and millions of universes and you are still what the Vedas call you, a *kanni* [Tamiḷ for kanyā], beautiful and an embodiment of bliss."

The *Marai* calls her *Kanni.* [The Vedas call her kanyā.] The statement is based on proper authority. The Vedas speak of the Gāyatrī specific to various deities and in the Gāyatrī pertaining to Durgā-Parameśvarī occurs the name "Kanyākumārī".

That being so [she being a kanyā] Ambā's hair must be black. The Ācārya has also described her without any room for doubt on this point: "Tulita-dalita-indīvaravanam". We must change the order thus: "Dalita-indīvara-vana-tulita." It means that Ambā's "hair is like a forest of indīvara flowers". It is a glossy black. "Ghana-snigdha-ślakṣṇam". "Ghana" may be taken to mean ''like a raincloud''. Kṛṣṇa is called "Ghana-śyām"[2]; here "ghana" means like a raincloud. Or we may take it to mean thickly grown. "Snigdham" = made glossy with the application of oil. We say "sneha" and "snehita" : these words are derived from the root word "snik". Oil is "sticky"; "snehitam" is mind and mind sticking together. Here Ambā's hair is well combed, not tangly. "Snigdha" can also mean soft or smooth. Then we have the word "ślakṣṇam": it too means glossy, without any knots. The Ācārya describes Ambā's hair with a chain of adjectives: it is like a forest of dark lotuses; glossy and black; dark, smooth and velvety. In the previous stanza the solid gold crown was described with difficult words, but here the words are silken like "tulita-dalita-indīvara-vanam". The Ācārya, a great proponent of Advaita, is a poet's poet.

Ambā's hair possesses the coolness and colour of indīvara flowers. But is that its only quality? The third line of the stanza mentions another remarkable characteristic of the hair: "sahaja saurabhyam", natural fragrance.

Even without flowers in it Ambā's hair is redolent of divine fragrance. There is a story told in our parts (Tamiḷ Nāḍu) of the Tamiḷ poet Nakkīrar. He insisted that Ambā's hair did not have any natural fragrance. Even after Īśvara showed him his forehead eye he did not change his opinion. For his offence he took ill and, feeling remorse, composed the *Tirumurgāṟṟupaḍai* and asked forgiveness of the divine powers and was restored to health.

The Ācārya asserts firmly that Ambā's hair is naturally fragrant: it has "sahaja saurabhyam".

In the (Vedic) Tryaṁbaka mantra, Śiva himself has the name of "Sugandhi". In the Malaikkoṭṭai temple (Rock Fort temple at Tiruci) which has considerable association with the *Saundaryalaharī* the goddess is Sugandhī — Sugandhakuntalāmbikā. "Kuntala" also means tresses of hair.

Even today in certain places where pūjā to Ambā is properly conducted and Ambā's appearance is recognised, we hear it being said, "There is the scent of screwpine (*tāzhai* in Tamiḷ) flowers in the air."

Ambā wears in her naturally fragrant hair flowers from Indra's celestial garden (Nandavana). In the earlier stanza there was a reference to the Indradhanus (rainbow) on Ambā's crown. Here we see that her hair has flowers from Indra's garden.

"Valamathana": one who slew the demon Vala. "Valamathana-vāṭī" = Indra's garden. "Vāṭī viṭapinām" = those belonging to the trees of that forest. "Viṭapa" is a tree. We must add "sumanasaḥ" from the third line. Generally "sumanas" is understood as one with a good manas or mind. The word is applied particularly to the celestial race. But "sumanas" also means a flower. Just as a man with his noble mind ablossom spreads his love without expecting any reward, so a flower unfolds itself and spreads its fragrance among people whether they are good or bad. "Valamathana-vāṭīviṭapinām ṣumanasaḥ": we have to understand the meaning thus, "flowers from the garden of Devendra's Nandavana, flowers like Mandāra and Pārijāta."

When Ambā's hair is naturally fragrant why should she wear these flowers? If not for their fragrance, is she wearing them because they are beautiful to look at? I am told some people, even though they have no eye defect, wear spectacles to enhance their appearance. Does Ambā wear flowers for a similar reason? No, not at all. She wears flowers not because she wants to wear them. The fact is it is the flowers themselves that are desirous of being worn by her. That is why they have themselves settled in her hair.

What is their desire?

"Yadīyam saurabhyam sahajam upalabdhum" : "Yadīyam" = of the hair; "saurabhyam sahajam" = natural fragrance; "upalabdhum" = to obtain. It is their desire to obtain for themselves the natural fragrance of Ambā's hair. "Labdhum" means to obtain, to acquire. Instead of experiencing the fragrance from a distance, the flowers yearn to enjoy the fragrance of Ambā's hair by being very close to it, indeed by being in her hair itself. This meaning is suggested by "upalabdhum". "Vasantyasmin" must be split as "vasanti asmin". The flowers of Devendra's garden "have acquired tenancy" of Ambā's hair to obtain its natural fragrance. "Asmin" = in it (that is "in the mass of hair"); "vasanti" = dwell; "manye" = so do I think.

The celestial flowers which far excel the flowers of the earth like the jasmine and *manoranjitam* dwell in Ambā's hair to obtain its natural fragrance. They do not make it fragrant; they are in that hair for their own benefit, to acquire the fragrance of Ambā's hair. The Ācārya prays that Ambā's tresses of hair, themselves dark, should dispel the darkness of our minds. The flowers (sumanasaḥ) become more alluring by being in her hair; so they are a support for all those noble-minded people (sumanasaḥ) who are engaged in meditation. A verse from the *Kṛṣṇa-Karṇāmṛta* says that, though dark himself, Kṛṣṇa is a lamp to remove our darkness of ignorance : "Nīlopi nirantaraḥ tamaḥ pradīpaḥ". Similar is the case with the dark hair of Ambā.

Do not keep asking about how dark hair can dispel the darkness of our minds. You will get an answer to your question if you meditate on

Sugandhakuntalāṁbikā's tresses of hair as the Ācārya has described them. And how has he described them? As a forest of indīvara flowers; as cool, densely grown, soft, glossy, silken; as beautified by celestial flowers which themselves are beautified by them (Ambā's tresses of hair).

In the keśādipāda[8] portrayal keśa or hair comes first. Although the crown has been described first, it is worn above the hair and is not a part of the body but an ornament for it. If you see the back of the idols of goddesses, the hair above the nape of the neck is made into a *piccoḍa* and adorned. It is this that the Ācārya has described.

In many of our temples of Ambā, the goddess is named after her hair: Kuntala-Nāyakī, Bhramara-Kuntalāmbā, Nīla-Kuntalāmbā, Puṣpa-Kuntalāmbā, Añjana-Kuntalāmbā, Sugandha-Kuntalāṁbikā. In the *Sahasranāmam* there are names of Ambā descriptive of her hair. The first is "Caṁpakāśokapunnāga-saugandhikalasatkacā;" then there is "Nīla-cikurā". The first name means Ambā with her hair adorned by campaka, aśoka, punnāga and saugandhika flowers. "Nīla-cikurā" means *Karunguzhali* in Tamiḷ (that is one with blue or black hair.) In the *Triśatī* we have the name "Elasugandhicikurā". We must meditate on the "keśabhāra" of Ambā so as to dispel our "kḷeśabhāra". [We must meditate on the locks of hair of Ambā so as to remove the burden of our hardships.]

Note & Reference

1 From Tāyumānavar's *Malaivalar Kadali.*

2 The Mahāsvāmī is presumably referring to how Northerners use the name "Ghanaśyāma", dropping the a-kāra at the end. They write "Ghanashyām" : they use "sh" for "ṣ" and "ś" while South Indians use "sh" for "ṣ" and have "s" for both "s" and "ś".

Chapter 79

"Saundaryalaharī"

The next stanza (44) is extremely beautiful and of special significance. The title of the hymn, "Saundaryalaharī", figures in it; it also deals with Ambā's hair. In the stanza that we just considered (43), the Ācārya says with reference to Ambā's hair, "May it dispel darkness (dhunotu dhvāntam)", while here (in Stanza 44) he refers to Ambā's hair itself as darkness, "kabarībhāra-timira". What is "cikura-nikuruṁbam" in the earlier stanza is "kabarībhāram" in the present one. The Ācārya calls darkness "dhvāntam" in the earlier stanza and "timiram" here.

Tanotu kṣemam nastava-vadanasaundaryalaharī
Parīvāhasrotaḥ-saraṇiriva sīmantasaraṇiḥ
Vahantī sindūram prabalakabarī-bhāra-timira-
Dviṣām bṛndair-bandīkṛtamiva navīnārka-kiraṇam

"Tanotu kṣemam naḥ"; "naḥ kṣemam tanotu" in prose order. The Ācārya begins the stanza auspiciously by saying, "May it bring well-being to all of us."

What is to bring us well-being?

"Sīmanta-saraṇi": the way created by the parting line of the hair.

"Sīmantam" means the parting line of the hair. "Saraṇi" denotes a path, a line, a wave. Here it means a line.

"May the parting line of the hair of Ambā bring us all well-being."

We perform a saṁskāra[1] called "sīmantam" during the pregnancy of a woman. It is intended for the well-being of the child she is carrying. Strictly speaking, the rite is "sīmantonnayana" = "sīmanta+unnayana". "Unnayana" means "drawing upward". I have already told you that "sīmantam" means parting of the hair. Drawing upward (from the forehead) along the parting of the hair with a porcupine quill is beneficial to the foetus. This rite is "sīmantonnayana".

Valaikāppu and sīmantam are performed during the pregnancy of a woman. The wearing of bangles *(valaikāppu)* is not for beauty alone. For women the bangles are a protection. We wear on our wrists black or red strings called "rakṣā" (protection). There is a ceremony called "kaṅkaṇadhāraṇam" during marriage and other functions. It is meant not only to protect us from external harm; it imparts us strength of will and gives us protection in the task [or ceremony] we are about to undertake. People often speak referring to a person [bent upon doing some work] : "He has worn a bangle, determined to do such and such a thing." [The wearing of a bangle or a bracelet is said to proclaim one's determination to carry out some task.] Apart from the wearing of a string, the wearing of bangles too is a protection for women. The Tamiḷ word for "rakṣaṇam" (protection) is *kāppu* and it is nowadays used to denote a plain bangle (that is one without any designs). Actually *valaikāppu* is a pleonasm like "trunk-box", "gate-*vaśal*".[2] The fact that *valai* itself has the power to protect us is forgotten nowadays. Let it be that the word *valaikāppu* at least reminds us of the importance of wearing bangles.

Why is "sīmantam" known as the parting line of the hair? "Sīmā" is border, boundary. We [people in Tamiḷ Nāḍu] speak of "*Teluṅgu sīmai*" and "*Malayāḷam sīmai*". It means that the areas referred to are enclosed by four boundaries. We used to refer to England, the land of the people who ruled us, the land far away from our own, as *Sīmai.*

"Antam" is end. "Sīmā" + "antam" is "sīmantam". The end of the boundary is "sīmantam". Strictly speaking "simā+antam" must be "sīmāntam". The seer who was the friend of all the world must be called "Viśvamitra", but as we know we pronounce the nama as "Viśvāmitra". In the latter word the *a* that should be short is used long and in the former the *a* that should be long is used short. There are exceptions like these [to the rules of samāsa and sandhi].

The end of which or what border is sīmantam [with reference to the saṁskāra]? The "end" of a woman's person or form. It was during the 20th century that it came to denote the end of the male person or form! So long as men had their śikhā, how could there have been a parting of the hair for them? Perhaps when they were children their hair must have been parted and also braided. There are two "borders" for the human body, the head and the feet. On the first border, that is the head, the parting line of the hair ends with the Brahmarandhra[g] in the crown of the head. That is why it is called sīmanta.

Mahālakṣmī resides permanently in five places. In the case of her idol we have to invoke her presence, make her reside in it and install it to the accompaniment of the prāna-pratiṣṭha mantra [the ceremony in which life is infused into the idol]. But in the five places I was speaking about she resides naturally without any ceremonial. These are the lotus, the forehead of the elephant, the hindpart of the cow, the back of the bilva leaf and the parting of the hair of sumaṅgalīs[g]. We apply turmeric and kuṁkuma to the face of the cow; it is to make her more beautiful; but when it comes to pūjā we perform it to her hindpart. We must touch our eyes with the same hand with which we have touched the hindpart of the cow in reverence. When we perform pūjā to Lakṣmī the rib of the bilva leaf must touch the idol; the rib is seen on the back of the leaf and it is there that the goddess is present. The fruit of the bilva tree is called "Śrīphala". Tulasī, that is so dear to Mahāviṣṇu, is not included among the abodes of Lakṣmī. In fact there are accounts in the Puraṇas of Lakṣmī picking up a quarrel with Tulasī because of her (Tulasī) being another wife of Mahāviṣṇu. The bilva that is so dear to Śiva is mentioned in the (Vedic hymn of) "Śrīsūkta" as being associated with Lakṣmī. One mantra in it says that the bilva fruit is a product of Lakṣmī's austerities and that it is capable of removing the "alakṣmī" that is in you and outside of you. Such is the special quality of the fruit. As for the bilva leaf Lakṣmī resides permanently on its back, on the rib. Like the rekhā [here meaning rib] of the bilva leaf is the parting line of the hair of sumaṅgalis.

The Ācārya gives greater importance to the parting of the hair of Ambā than to any other part of her body because it is in that that Lakṣmī resides, Laksmi the Mother and the personification of all good fortune. This importance is reflected in the fact that the Ācārya also associates the parting of the hair with the title of the hymn itself, *Saundaryalaharī.* Whether it was the Ācārya himself who gave his hymn that title or someone who came after him, the reason for choosing it — a term that occurs in the stanza itself — is that it is beautiful and wholly appropriate to the work.

"Saundaryalaharī" means a wave of beauty, a flood of beauty. I said that when the formless Parāśakti took the form that bestows grace it created waves of beauty. That form is "Saundaryalaharī". Ambā's divinely auspicious figure is the flood of beauty arising from her grace, says the Ācārya. He uses the term referring to its association with her parting line of hair, sīmanta.

Does it mean that, according to him, the wave of beauty of Ambā is created by that sīmanta? No. He remarks that it is from her divine face that the wave of beauty originates: "Tava vadana-saundaryalaharī." This is appropriate. Although Ambā's entire body is a flood of beauty, is not her head, as that of any individual, the most important part. And it is the head which gives a person his identity. If someone wants to look at us he has to do so with his eyes, speak to us with his mouth, and listen to us with his ears; and if we give him food he has to eat it with his mouth. All such activities are controlled by the brain which is also part of the head. Even beauty is known from a person's eyes, nose, teeth and the disposition of his or her face. Emotions too are gauged from the face. If a man is beautiful it means his face is beautiful. The beauty of hands and legs comes later. Ambā's sidelong glance, gentle smile and nectarine speech: all these belong to her face. That is why the Ācārya says that from her face spring waves of her beauty — "Tava vadana-saundaryalaharī."

This flow of beauty is the motherly form assumed by the Paramātman to give us the highest blessing, and well-being ; indeed its very purpose is to bestow grace on us.

"Tanotu kṣemam naḥ tava vadana-saundaryalaharī."

"Mother, the flood of beauty flowing from your beautiful face is not mere beauty. It is grace [a flood of grace], and may it bring us well-being."

What is the special connection of "sīmanta" with all this? Let us consider.

"Vahantī sindūram."

The Ācārya says that the sīmanta carries sindūra. Mention of sindūra will remind some of the red-coloured powder used in the Siddha system of medicine. From its red colour the medicine is called *cenduram* (in Tamiḷ). People speak of "Sindūra Vināyaka", Gaṇapati who is all red. In the North, and in some rare cases in the South also, Gaṇapati is seen smeared with sindūra. Like the god who is worshipped first, Āñjaneya who is adored last is also covered with sindūra. But not other deities. Sindūra is specially applied to the Ādi deity and the Anta deity alone [to the first and the last, Vināyaka and Hanumān].

In the old texts, kuṁkuma is referred to as sindūra. When Mother Veda prostrates herself before Ambā, keeping her head at the feet of the goddess, the kuṁkuma in the parting of her hair sticks to Ambā's feet and becomes her pādadhūli (dust on her feet), so it is mentioned in the *Sahasranāmam*. The kuṁkuma in the parting of the hair is called here "sīmanta-sindūri". It is learnt from the *Sahasranāmam* that the kuṁkuma is applied to the parting of the hair and that what Ambā wears on the forehead, between the eyebrows, is the bindu (dot) with musk : the name, "Mukhacandra-kalaṅkābha-mṛganābhi-viśeṣakā", occurs in the *Sahasranāmam*. Like the blemish on the moon is the musk dot on Ambā's face. Since this name comes between the one that describes the forehead and the one that describes the eyebrows, it is clear that the reference is to the spot between the eyebrows. Kuṁkuma in the parting of the hair, "sīmanta-sindūri"— here too the Ācārya refers to the kuṁkuma in the parting of the hair as sindūra.

According to the śāstras the place where women must apply sindūra, praying for the long life of their husbands and for all good fortune, is the parting of the hair. The kuṁkuma worn in the middle of the forehead is an adornment. The space between the eyebrows is connected with one-pointedness of the mind as one meditates on the Paramātman; that is why sandal-paste and ashes are worn there. Even so it is not specially important for sumaṅgalis. In the old days they first applied kuṁkuma to the parting of the hair and then only to the forehead.

To invoke the presence of Mahālakṣmī, who is also called Bhāgyalakṣmī (the goddess of fortune), kuṁkuma must be applied to her abode which is on the line of parting of the hair. There are women who smear it liberally on the entire line of parting. If not in this manner kuṁkuma must be applied just above the forehead where the parting of the hair starts.

Aṁbikā has kuṁkuma all through the parting line of her hair: "vahantī sindūram......sīmantasaraṇi", "the way of the parting of the hair in which kuṁkuma is worn." It is only when the kuṁkuma is applied to the entire line of the parting that there will be a "kuṁkuma saraṇi", a path of kuṁkuma. If it is applied only to the starting point of the parting it will be a big dot and no more. From what the Ācārya says subsequently (his description is the soul of his poetic imagination and the aesthetic pleasure afforded by the stanza) Ambikā has applied a big dot where the parting begins and extended it upwards in a thin streak all the way of the parting.

There is nothing signifying greater good fortune or joy than meditating on Ambā's parting of hair. The divine presence of Ambā is all auspiciousness and the parting of her hair in which Mahālakṣmī resides is adorned by kuṁkuma.

Wherever Ambā is present there Lakṣmī is seen as her companion and attendant. The Supreme Goddess is flanked by Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī who fan her with fly-whisks, so says the *Sahasranāmam*: "Sa-cāmara-ramā-vāṇī-savya-dakṣiṇa-sevitā." Instead of having them as companions, Ambā has them as her two eyes ; they say this is the divine form of Kāmākṣī. "Ka" stands for Sarasvatī, "Ma" for Lakṣmī; and "akṣa" is eye: so the three syllables together ("Kāmākṣī") mean one who has Kā and Mā for her eyes.

The Ācārya says in a later stanza (64) that Ambā lifts up Sarasvatī and places her on the tip of her own tongue. Haven't I told you that speech is of special importance to Ambā? When we speak of very learned men we say that Sarasvatī dances on the tip of their tongues. Similarly, the Ācārya says that Sarasvatī resides on the tip of Ambā's tongue. After much atheistic talk, the tongue of the speaker, it is said, becomes calloused[3]. Here it is the opposite. Constantly speaking about Īśvara's sport and extolling his various qualities — in the manner of performing japa — Ambā's tongue becomes red like a hibiscus flower. Hibiscus is "japā" (in Sanskrit). By telling the story of Īśvara in the manner of doing japa, Ambā's tongue becomes red like "japā" (hibiscus).

The Ācārya thus indulges in verbal play. When Ambā's tongue becomes red thus, Sarasvatī dwelling on its tip also becomes red like an image made of gems, says the Ācārya. In keeping with the fact that Ambā is mentioned in many places as having made the white-complexioned Śiva red, she makes his sister (Sarasvatī) also a revolutionary! We saw earlier of how poets worship Ambā as a red-coloured Sarasvatī and compose poetry that is a wave of the erotic rasa. Here the white Sarasvatī is conceived of as the red Sarasvatī.

Of the two who serve Ambā by fanning her with the fly-whisk, one (Sarasvatī) is elevated by her by being placed on the tip of her tongue while the other (Mahālakṣmī) is given a higher place by being placed in the parting of her hair where she decorates Ambā with sindūra.

The sīmanta of any sumaṅgalī is the abode of Bhāgyalakṣmī; how much more exalted must be the sīmanta of Ambā who is the source of all good fortune? We must meditate on it as the pinnacle of all good fortune and beauty. At the very beginning of *Abhirāmī-Antādī*, Abhirāmībhaṭṭa calls the sīmanta-sindūra *"ucci-tilakam"*. Mark the term *ucci-tilakam* [the tilaka on the crown of the head]; it is not *"neṟṟi-tilakam"* [not the tilaka on the forehead]. Sumaṅgalīs, apart from applying kuṁkuma to the forehead, must wear the same on the *ucci,* the parting of the hair.

The hair of Ambā, which is like the forest of indīvaras described in the previous stanza, is divided by the parting in the middle. The parting is naturally white. But Ambā, who makes the white-complexioned Śiva and Sarasvatī red, makes the parting of her hair also the same colour. Her tresses of hair are like waves of glossy black and the parting shines amidst them as a bright red line.

Many of us are unable to appreciate beauty like this. We turn away from objects of beauty, reject them as useless, since we are interested only in things of utility. But some do have an aesthetic sense. As for the poets, when they see an object of beauty, they do not stop with it, they seek or think of other objects of beauty, create their own images of beauty in their imagination.

What simile does suggest itself to the Ācārya after seeing [with his mind's eye] the glossy black hair of Ambā which is like the waves of the blue-black sea and its line of parting which is like red colour flowing through it?

> *....prabala-kabarī-bhāra-timira-*
> *Dviṣām bṛndair-bandīkṛtamiva navīnārka-kiraṇam*

"Navīnārka kiraṇam": "arka"= the sun; "arka-kiraṇam" = ray of the sun. "Navīna arka" = the new sun - *i.e.* the rising sun. "Navīnārka-kiraṇam" = ray of the rising sun.

What does the rising sun look like? He is vermilion in colour, which is also the colour of Rājarājeśvarī. The *Sahasranāmam* says the same thing, "Udyad-bhānu" which again finds its echo in Abhirāmībhaṭṭa's *Antādi, "udikkinra cenkadir"*.

The Ācārya sees the parting of the hair of Ambā, smeared with sindūra, as a ray of the rising sun. The big dot she has applied to the spot where the parting of the hair starts is like the rising sun. The line of kuṁkuma starting from it is like a ray of the rising sun.

"Prabala-kabarībhāra-timira-dviṣām bṛndair bandīkṛtam." What is the meaning of this tongue-twisting line? Through the sound of the words, whether it is pleasing or harsh, the Ācārya conveys his meaning. Here the words sound as if they are daring us to a fight. Who is going to fight with whom? The theme here is the parting of the hair of Ambā. Who is coming to wrestle with it [the parting of Ambā's hair]?

"Kabarī-bhāra-timiram": the darkness that is the black mass of Ambā's hair. "Prabala" comes as its adjective. We [in Tamiḷ Nāḍu] are used to thinking that the word means "famous". The literal meaning is "specially forceful or strong". The Ācārya qualifies the darkness that is Ambā's black tresses of hair with this word, Ambā's black hair that is especially strong. And when one feels one is excessively strong one becomes belligerent. But with whom will the darkness of Ambā's hair pick up a quarrel, with whom will it fight? Darkness fights with what? With light. Darkness goes to battle with the rising sun which is its born enemy and which brings night to an end and creates daytime. Here, if darkness is Ambā's hair, the rising sun is the kuṁkuma in the parting of her hair. Had she applied it to some other part of her body, like her hand or leg, the hair would not be able to do anything about it. Ambā has placed the rising sun on the crown of her head and thus given an opportunity to her hair to fight with it. And, indeed, the darkness of her hair has set out to fight with the rising sun with all gusto.

When light approaches, darkness has to flee. When you place a lamp in an area of darkness, the darkness takes to flight, does it not? Day after day the sun makes its appearance and day after day darkness disappears as the sun rises. When one obtains jñāna, ajñāna is dispelled without it leaving any trace. We compare this to darkness being dispelled as the sun appears. How can darkness oppose the sun with courage? [The reference is to the darkness of Ambā's hair.] If it is contrary to what one expects (contrary to nature), it is due to the encouragement given it by Ambā, to the darkness of her hair. If a person feels that he has the liberty to do anything it means he has been given "room" to do whatever he likes. Ambā has given darkness (her hair) a place (that is room) on her head itself. She dotes on it by oiling it every day so as to enhance its glossiness and by wearing in it celestial flowers. It is because of her support and encouragement that it has become excessively strong.

[A story is told of Garuḍa and Ādiśeṣa.] "Garuḍa, are you well?" asks Ādiśeṣa. "If one is in one's own place one will be well," is the answer, and it has become a well-known saying. The case of Ambā's hair is similar.

Perumāḷ (Viṣṇu) is seen in two aspects: reclining (on Ādiśeṣa) in the ocean of milk and holding *durbar* in Vaikuṇṭha. It is during the time he reclines on Ādiśeṣa, in the ocean of milk, that he is adored by Ananta, Garuḍa, Viṣvaksena and all other attendants of his. Ananta is the same as Ādiśeṣa. It is on him that Viṣṇu reclines: it is Viṣṇu's Anantaśayana as well as Ānandaśayana.

Ādiśeṣa is afraid of going to Vaikuṇṭha where Viṣṇu holds court. There all the importance is for Garuḍa. In the ocean of milk it is Ādiśeṣa who supports Viṣṇu and as he does so he has to remain in one place. But once Viṣṇu leaves his couch of Ādiśeṣa it is Garuḍa who assumes importance. In temple after temple (in Tamiḷ Nāḍu) there is a sanctum to him and he is called *"Periya Tiruvaḍi"* facing Viṣṇu. Unlike Ādiśeṣa who has to remain in one place supporting Viṣṇu, Garuḍa flies from place to place carrying Viṣṇu on his back. If an elephant-king raises a cry of distress in some world or other it is Garuḍa who has to rush to the spot with Viṣṇu on his back.

The snake and Garuḍa are born enemies. It is always Garuḍa who wins [if there is a fight between the two]. Garuḍa tears the snake to shreds and gobbles it up. The snake which is feared by everybody itself trembles at the mention of Garuḍa's name. The elephant has nightmares of the lion and the rat of the cat.

Ādiśeṣa who is the support of the whole world trembles before Garuḍāzhvār[4] who is the vehicle of Viṣṇu. So he is afraid of going to Vaikuṇṭha where Viṣṇu holds court.

Ādiśeṣa who trembles before Garuḍa saw the latter when he came to worship Viṣṇu who was reclining on the great serpent in the ocean of milk. Ādiśeṣa was proud of his importance in the ocean of milk, especially because Viṣṇu reclined on him. Viṣṇu in fact lay like a huge green mountain stretching his body from head to foot on him and this gave Ādiśeṣa some courage and confidence due to the feeling that he was protected by the god.

Ordinarily, when we see people who are superior to us in position and strength, we must prostrate ourselves before them without mentioning their names. If we meet a person of the same rank and status we must make inquiries about his health, well-being, etc, and ask him, "Are you well?" Even then we must not call him by his name. If the person we meet is younger, we may address him by his name and ask him, "Are you well?"

Ādiśeṣa who had always been fearful of Garuḍa as one superior to him was now emboldened to speak to him because Viṣṇu was reclining on him. He thought that he was now occupying a position higher than that of Garuḍa and felt the urge to have a dig at him. So he called Garuḍa by his name and asked, "Garuḍa! Are you all right?"

Garuḍa understood how Ādiśeṣa had suddenly become bold. And his reply showed how clever he was. He said: "Anyone will be well if he is where he ought to be."

Ādiśeṣa asked Garuḍa about his well-being. Fear is the biggest cause of unhappiness and Garuḍa has had no cause for fear at any time. It is Ādiśeṣa who is half the time unhappy because of his fear. It is only when he is with Viṣṇu that he is without any fear. When he asks Garuḍa about his well-being, the king of birds has a dig at him in his reply: "If one is where one ought to be, one will be well." So goes the story.

Even planets have their power only when they are in their own houses. So one must be where one ought to be.

Darkness is in trouble in some place or other in the world. What may be called its direct foe is light and it is unable to encounter it (light). When the rising sun appears, it has to flee unable to face its onslaught. The infant sun is a greater enemy of darkness than the "bigger" midday sun. It does not know the "bigger" sun at all. As soon as the infant sun appears it runs away from it. "Although I was keeping the whole world within my grasp, as the little sun appears I have to run away," so thinks darkness to itself, angry because of the humiliation it has to suffer (at the hands of the sun). It takes a vow: "One day I will get hold of this infant sun and will have it bound so that I may not feel threatened by it."

Now Ambā has gathered that darkness into her tresses of hair. Then she has combed that hair and placed the infant sun in it. Darkness, finding new courage, is now full of excitement and happiness.

Darkness surrounds the sun on Ambā's forehead (the sun in the form of the sindūra tilaka) and swallows the rays emanating from it. Contrary to the usual phenomenon of light swallowing darkness, here it is darkness that consumes light. Like the light of the sun forming a halo round it and pervading all space, should not the sindūra tilaka of Ambā, that is like the rising sun, spread its light all over Ambā's head and make her hair a lustrous red? But only one ray of this sun is seen and it is in the form of the red-coloured parting line of Ambā's hair. All the remaining rays lie buried in the hair which shines in all its black glory. This means that the darkness of the hair has fought with the red lustre of the sun, triumphed over it, rendered it incapable of rising again..... You must meditate on this hair of Ambā. The parting of the hair of the great sumaṅgalī is a lustrous red smeared with kuṁkuma. Around it, and almost pressing against it, is the mass of hair that appears in waves of black. The blackness of the hair enhances the redness of the line of parting and this redness, in its turn, intensifies the blackness of the hair itself.

The darkness that is Ambā's mass of hair challenges the rising sun in the form of the sindūra tilaka on her forehead thus: "Now see what you can do to me." Then, surrounding it on all sides, it devours all its rays, leaving just one untouched.

Why does the darkness of Ambā's hair leave just one ray undevoured? If it has not done so there will be no evidence of its having fought with the sun. There are so many red objects that do not have rays emitting light. So we would think this is just another example of the same kind [the ray not devoured by darkness]. If there is just one ray of the sun left we would look at it in amazement and recognise that all the other rays have been "conquered" by the darkness.

"Dviṣām bṛndaiḥ" means "by the enemy forces in their hordes." "Dviṣām" is derived from "dviṣ"; "bṛndam" is a collection. The darkness that we see, as wave after wave of Ambā's hair, resembles enemy forces arrayed before us. "Bandīkṛtamiva": as if imprisoned by this invading army. The rising sun that is the sīmanta sindūra looks as if imprisoned.

Not to speak of the rays that were devoured, what about the ray that is left undevoured? Is this ray at least allowed to remain in freedom? No. It has been clapped in gaol and it cannot move this side or that. The parting of the hair must be in the middle, not on any side. We cannot change its place as we like. From the word "bandīkṛtam" we infer that the line of parting of the hair is not free to move this side or that. If the divine presence is needed, the parting should not be on this or that side and must be right in the middle. The kuṁkuma must be made of pure turmeric, not of *maida* or of artificial colours — it is all evil.

The word "bandam" means among other things "to arrest". "Bandi" means "prisoner". "Bandīkṛtam iva" means "as if arrested."

If Ambā's sindūra sīmanta is seen in the middle of the mass of her hair, it looks as if arrested by the hordes of the enemy forces of darkness.

"What is the connection between the lazy sun that is the parting of Ambā's hair, the sun that suffered at the hands of darkness, and the wave of beauty of the Supreme Goddess that creates well-being of the highest order?"

In the previous stanza we saw that, with the blackness that is tamas, Ambā dispels the darkness of nescience. Here she exalts the sīmanta, the parting line of her hair, that has suffered defeat in a sense [at the hands of the very darkness], and with that itself creates well-being. The sīmanta, the abode of Lakṣmī, is in fact the resting place of all well-being. Its defeat is only a matter of imagination. "Bandīkṛtamiva", "as if imprisoned": it is not that it is really or permanently imprisoned.

Now let us see the exalted position of the parting line of Ambā's hair: it is the very soul of the stanza. The Ācārya in fact mentions it first and then only does he speak of its failure. It was I who changed the order thinking that the stanza should not conclude on a note of failure [that is the failure suffered by the sīmanta at the hands of the darkness of the hair]. The first two lines of the stanza:

Tanotu kṣemam nastava-vadana-saundaryalaharī
parīvāhasrotaḥ-saraṇiriva sīmantasaraṇiḥ

Ordinarily great poets use words sparingly and merely suggest the meaning they want to convey. Also they do not use a number of words in a stanza meaning the same, *i.e.* synonyms. If at all they use more than one word with the same meaning, it is to underline the importance of the subject they are dealing with.

Here four words, "laharī", "parīvāham", "srotas" and "saraṇi", are used. They have more or less the same meaning. It is to convey the idea forcefully, how great the flow of Ambā's beauty is, that these four words with almost the same meaning are used in the same context.

There is a point in my saying "more or less the same meaning". Actually the four words do not all mean precisely the same thing. A great poet would be reluctant to use words that have an identical sense. Though ordinary people may not differentiate between the words, the learned would note the minute differences in their meaning [the nuances] and use them in such a manner as to heighten the literary flavour of the poem concerned.

It is thus that the four words differ in their meanings. "Laharī" is a wave on the surface of water; "parīvāham" is the same as "pravāham" and is a stream that has its course over a large area. "Srotas" need not be a turbulent flow but a channel. "Saraṇi", as mentioned in the term "sīmanta-saraṇi", is a straight flow. No river flows in a straight line; so "saraṇi" is like a man-made canal. "Laharī" is that which rises and falls in the same place, then "parīvāham" or "pravāham" that courses through a number of places over a large area; afterwards "srotas" which is a stream coursing through in a disciplined manner so to speak; and lastly "saraṇi" which is a man-made canal meant to carry the water from the "srotas".

Ambā's beauty is like this. It rises as a wave from her face and then spreads as a "parīvāham". When it touches the top of her forehead it becomes a river and when the mass of hair becomes embankments for the river it refuses to be contained by them. Ambā's beauty has to be like this: it must go beyond all shores, all embankments. It is no matter of pride for it if embankments are built to contain it "Vaktra-Laksmī-parīvāha..." : "the flow of lustre of the face" is the term mentioned in the *Sahasranāmam*. Ambā's beauty flows round her face like a river, as if contained by it; then it becomes placid along the forehead but becomes a quick flow without being contained by the shore of the hair. All of a sudden this flow of the loveliness of Ambā's face breaks over the shores, and rising above, as if against all obstacles, becomes narrow and straight as the darkness [the darkness of her hair] presses against it from both sides. It now takes the course of a canal. This canal (saraṇi) is the line of parting of Ambā's hair (sīmanta-saraṇi). Her sīmanta is a line representing her beauty which is but an expression of her compassion. Above it, and beyond it, you do not see any part of the goddess's body. When we pray for the well-being of all, as a blessing of Ambā's beauty, we give particular importance to the wave of beauty of her face, "vadana-saundaryalaharī". The Ācārya gives here even greater importance to Ambā's sīmanta which is a channel created by the loveliness of her face rising as a flow against all obstacles.

For the sake of Kṛṣṇa Paramātman, a path was created across the Yamunā which was in flood. The flood of beauty of Ambā's face has made a path for itself amid her tresses of black hair which are like a flood of darkness, like the Yamunā itself.

"Tanotu kṣemam naḥ." If we read this stanza with all our heart, meditating on Ambā, her beauty will save us from being imprisoned by all those hordes of our enemies like desire. We will obtain spiritual uplift and will be blessed with the power to do good to all the world also.

Tanotu kṣemam nastava-vadanasaundaryalaharī
Parīvāhāsrotaḥ - saraṇiriva sīmantasaraṇiḥ
Vahantī sindūram prabalakabarībhāra-timira-
Dviṣām bṛndair-bandīkṛtamiva navīnārka-kiraṇam

Notes

[1] Literally "refining". Rites performed from conception to death. See *Hindu Dharma.*

[2] *"Vāśal"* means a gateway or a doorway in Tamiḷ.

[3] From the *Tiruvācakam.*

[4] "Garuḍāzhvār". Vaisṇavas in the South add "Āzhvār" to the name of Garuḍa, giving the sacred mount of Viṣṇu a place similar to that of the Tamiḷ saint-poets called "Āzhvārs".

Chapter 80

The Two Half-Moons that Changed Places

In the next stanza (45), although the description of Ambā's hair continues, what is important in it is the delineation of her face. It is in connection with it that we have a reference to the hair falling over her forehead.

It is customary to compare the face to the lotus. The terms "mukha-kamalam" and "vadanāravindam" [both meaning "lotus face"] are frequently seen in books. What the Ācārya does is not making a general comparison of Ambā's face to the lotus. He deals with the various similarities between the World Mother's face and the lotus, "item by item" .

The lotus unfolds its petals little by little and that is part of its beauty. Ambā's gentle smile is similar. Her lips part slowly, tenderly, revealing the enchantment of her smile and showing the teeth inside which are like the filaments of a lotus. Like the lotus again, Ambā's face has a sweet fragrance. The bee remains embedded in the lotus imbibing its nectar. A number of bees keep buzzing round it. The one who burnt Manmatha with his eye (Manmatha who had a bow made of bees), the eyes of the same one, Parameśvara, become black bees imbibing the nectar that is the sweetness of Ambā's face. The hair playfully falling over her forehead looks like a swarm of bees surrounding a lotus. In this fashion, the Ācārya brings in may parallels between Ambā and the lotus.

The face like the moon is as conventional a description as the face like the lotus. If something novel is attempted in a poem it means an extra element of literary rasa imparted to it. This is precisely what the Ācārya does in the next stanza (46):

Lalāṭam lāvaṇya-dyuti-vimalam ābhati tava yat
Dvitīyam tanmanye makuṭaghaṭitam candraśakalam

Viparyāsa-nyāsād ubhayamapi sambhūya ca mithaḥ
Sudhālepasyūtiḥ pariṇamati rākā-himakaraḥ

Likening the face of a human being or a deity [as mentioned before] to the lotus is a convention that many poets have followed. The Ācārya has himself resorted to it often. Mūka refers to Ambā thus: "Rākā-candra-samāna-kānti-vadanā". "Rākā" is the full moon. Dīkṣitar^{g} uses a similar term, "Rākā-śaśi-vadane", in his composition beginning with the word, "Kañcadalāyadākṣī". Even our present stanza concludes with a mention of the full moon, "Rākā-himakaraḥ". But it is not used as a simile for the entire face of Ambā. Were it so there would be nothing remarkable about it.

What then does the Ācārya say?

From the way I have explained the meaning of stanzas by rearranging the words, you must have yourselves understood that "Makuṭaghaṭitam-candra-śakalam" means Ambā's crown encrusted with the crescent moon. "Lalāṭam" is forehead and "vimalam" is a word all of you must be familiar with [it means "without any blemish or impurity"]. "Dyuti" is lustre, light. "Ābhāti" means shines. "Tava" means your(s). "Yat" = that which; "tat" = that. ("Tan-manye" is "tat-manye"). "Manye" = think — it has been used in an earlier stanza (43).

I have told you so often that "advaitam" or "advitīyam" means that which has no second. It is the opposite of "dvitīyam"; so it could be guessed that the word "dvitīyam" in the stanza means "the second". Altogether what do the first two lines mean?

"Your forehead that is unblemished and that shines with a beautiful lustre looks like a second image of the half-moon adorning your crown."

Simply, it means there is a half-moon on Ambā's head.

Ambā and Īśvara carry the crescent moon of Tritīyā or the third day (of the bright fortnight), not the Aṣṭamī Candra (moon of the eighth day). The half-moon is of Aṣṭamī. But if you look closely at the crescent moon of the third day depicted on idols and in paintings, you will note that the two ends of the crescent have dots which, if connected, would form the diameter of the full moon. If it is the Aṣṭamī moon (half-moon) you will see the line joining these points. On the third day following the new moon they will not be seen. You will see what looks like a slice of pumpkin, the rest of the half-moon being scooped out. If you see the crescent moon of the third day in the sky you will see the outline up to the points of the diameter. If you look at it more closely you will even see the outline of the full moon faintly. It is the half-moon that is on Ambā's head. There are references to this half-moon in Tamil texts like the *Tiruppugazh*[g] and the *Tevāram*[g].

The semicircular forehead of Ambā looks like a half-moon. The *Sahasranāmam* also refers to it by the name, "Aṣṭamī-candra-vibhrāja-dalikasthala-śobhitā".

Ambā has one half-moon on the crown, the second half-moon being her forehead itself.

It is now that we come to the intriguing part of the stanza.

Viparyāsa-nyāsād ubhayamapi saṁbhūya ca mithaḥ
Sudhālepasyūtiḥ pariṇamati rākā-himakaraḥ

"Ubhayamapi" = both (the two), half moon of the crown and the half moon that is the forehead. "Ubhayaḥ" = two (both). Perumāḷ or Viṣṇu being with Śrīdevī and Bhūdevī is referred to by Bhaṭṭas as being with *"Ubhaya-nācciyārgal"* [*"nācciyār"*, Tamiḷ word, means a queen, here consort of Viṣṇu]. The upper half of the moon and the lower half of the moon, "mithaḥ" = mutually, one with the other —

"Viparyāsa-nyāsād": the phrase should not be split thus, "Viparya-sanyāsād", to mean that the reference is to a sannyāsin. "Viparyāsa" means reverse order, making something upside down. "Nyāsam" has the sense here of joining.

How do you find the two half-moons, the upper and the lower ones? What is on the crown is the lower half of the full moon and the lower half-moon is Ambā's forehead shaped like the upper half of the full moon. In other words the upper half of the full moon is the lower one here and the lower half is the upper one here. If the two are joined together in the reverse order? "Sambhūya ca": if they are glued together?......

"How can the two be stuck together with paste? We may keep the one upon the other but how can they be securely pasted together? Where do you find the gum good enough for this?"

Yes, there is such a gum. You need not go far looking for it. The moon itself has it. Does not the moon have amṛta, ambrosia? It also serves as a paste. "Sudhā-lepa-syūtiḥ": "sudhā" is nectar; "lepa" is a paste or gum; "syūtiḥ" is sewing. If you stick the two parts together with paste there is the risk of their being separated. This gum called amṛta is not an ordinary paste or gum. It keeps the two parts sewn together secure and there will be no risk of their becoming separated.

Thus if you take the half-moon on Ambā's head and the half-moon that is her forehead and, reversing the two, sew [join] them together with the nectar exuding from the moon itself — "rākā himakaraḥ pariṇamati" — you will get the full moon.

Instead of speaking of Ambā's whole face as the full moon, the Ācārya speaks of her forehead as a half moon and, taking the half moon on the head, he asks us to keep the two reversed and fasten them together with amṛta [which is exuded by the moon itself]. Thus out of his strange imagination is created the full moon. He concludes the stanza with the words "rākā himakaraḥ":

In the end, when referring to the full moon, he describes it as "himakaraḥ", remembering how it rains coolness. Earlier he had spoken of it as exuding "sudhā" or nectar. With pūrṇimā, that is "rākā", the Ācārya has associated coolness. The full moon of the month of Mārgaśīrṣa which rains coolness has a special significance. *"Tiruvādirai"* [Tiru+Ārdrā, or Śrī Ardrā] is celebrated on this day. When the cold of the winter is combined with the coolness of the full moon, Naṭarāja who embodies the universe is bathed the whole night in sandal-paste. *"Ādirai"* is from "Ārdrā" and it means wet. There is a verse which says that near Naṭarāja, who is wet because of his abhiṣeka[g] of various kinds, is Ambā, the daughter of the mountain of snow, and herself wet in her compassion. "Vāme bhāge dayā'rdrā Himagiri-duhitā." In the very first stanza (42) of the "Saundaryalaharī" section of the hymn the Ācārya calls Ambā "Himagirisutā" and he refers here to the full moon as "himakara". It occurs to me that he must have been reminded of the abhiṣeka performed to Naṭarāja on the day of Ārdrā[1].

Note

1 This discourse was given by the Mahāsvāmī in 1958 during the Tiruvādirai (Ārdrā) festival.

Chapter 81

The Eyebrows as Bow — The Eyes as Bowstring

The next stanza (47) is more knotty than this (46). I wonder whether I shall be able to make you understand all the poetic devices adopted in it. The effort to explain it all I regard as pūjā offered to Ambā; and to try to grasp the meaning of the stanza is to make us think of her and to keep us going round her again and again. Were the stanza part of an ordinary hymn it could be explained easily. It is not possible to fix our minds on Ambā, without taking some trouble. Poetic beauty consists in imagery that is ingeniously and intelligently expressed, in resorting to certain literary devices to convey ideas : these will keep us brooding for long so as to discover the meaning of the passage in question. The Ācārya has blessed us with a few such difficult stanzas on Ambā. Much time will be needed to grasp their meaning. The time spent in understanding them will be time spent in thinking of Ambā. That must be the reason why the Ācārya composed such verses. As we keep unravelling the tangled skein these verses are we will keep meditating on Ambā. At the same time removing the tangles in the stanzas will be of help to us in becoming freed from the complexities, difficulties, of life itself.

Now for the sloka:

Bhruvau bhugne kiñcidbhuvana-bhaya-bhaṅga-vyasanini
Tvadīye netrābhyām madhukara-rucibhyām dhṛtaguṇam
Dhanur manye savyetarakara-gṛhītam Ratipateḥ
Prakoṣṭhe muṣṭau ca sthagayati niguḍhāntaram Ume

"Bhruvau" the two eyebrows. The Tamiḷ *"puruvam"* and the English "brow" are both derived from the Sanskrit "bhru". Its dual form is "bhruvau". How do Ambā's brows look? "Kiñcid bhugnaḥ", somewhat knitted.

Are they knitted in anger? No. When one is lost in thought the brows become knitted and it is the same case with Ambā's brows. When the brows are creased in anger they are raised a bit and they will not look arched as they should naturally. Now Ambā's brows are more curved than they are even naturally. They are arched like this when she grants abhaya (freedom from fear) or when she is sad because her children are experiencing fear.

"I look at Ambā. Her brows are knitted. I feel she is lost in thought. This is confirmed by the expression on her face. What does her face suggest? That she is vyasanini."

"Vyasana" means sorrow, worry. Why does Ambā feel sad or how is she vyasanini? After describing her as "Ānandalaharī" and "Cidānandalaharī", what is the sense, Svāmi, in saying that she is sad and that her brows are creased because of that?

Yes. She is indeed Ānandalaharī within. However, is she not our Mother? Is she not the Mother of all the worlds? People are suffering agony, trapped as they are in the fear of worldly existence. Ambā has shown them many ways in which they can free themselves from such existence. But they have ignored them and are suffering because of it. They are always gripped by one fear or another. Ambā is sad — she is vyasanini[1] because she is worried about banishing this fear from all the worlds: "bhuvana-bhaya-bhaṅga-vyasanini." "Bhaya-bhanga" : Ambā will break down, destroy, fear. "Dhanurbhangam" means breaking the bow, is it not? Ambā will break down our fear. She will now and then think of new ways of how we can conquer our fear or reveal to us [make known to us] ācāryas for the same purpose. This is the reason [her concern for us] why she has flickered her brows, brows that are arched like bows.

In an earlier stanza (24) we had this: "Kṣanacalitayoḥ bhrūlatikayoḥ". By momentarily flickering her brows Ambā makes the pañcakṛtya deities perform their functions. She is all-powerful and the embodiment of all bliss. The Supreme Being that she is, when she is in the aspect of Mother, all are her children, including grass, worms, insects, humans, celestials. Just as an ordinary mother is worried about her children, she, the World Mother, is anxious about all her offspring. "These children of mine should not know any hardship, any fear. But they are suffering, they are in fear," thus worried, the Compassionate One is lost in thought and knits her eyebrows in her sorrow —

"Bhruvau bhugne kiñcid-bhuvana-bhaya-bhaṅga-vyasanini."

From the brows of a person we can know his or her mind. The Ācārya has composed the stanza based on his close observation of this phenomenon. "My children must not know any fear; but they seem to be already in its grip, so Ambā thinks to herself, worrying. It is not explicitly stated in the stanza that she knits her brows in her worry. Does she perhaps exclaim angrily, "Who is that? Who is trying to hurt my children?" The brows are creased when we speak in an intimidating voice. Even when we remove a person's worries and keep him in good cheer our brows curve in another fashion. "Bhuvana-bhaya-bhanga-vyasanini" : [as explained above] in removing the fear of people also the brows become knitted.

Ambā has taken upon herself the duty of protecting people from fear. But does she remove their fear after they are gripped by it or does she prevent them from becoming subject to it? For a mother it seems particularly appropriate if, as a precaution, she sees to it that her children are kept away from fear. But then the idea of "bhuvana-bhaya-bhaṅga" does not fit in here. No, no, there is nothing remarkable about fear being kept at bay from her children. In that case there will be no opportunity for us to keep thinking of Ambā and of our hearts melting in remembrance of her compassion : we are not likely to develop love for her. When we are gripped by fear and she destroys it we will feel happy that we are freed from fear and in our joy rush to our Mother and clasp her.

I have spoken to you about these stanzas, their beauty of expression, the beauty of the meaning they convey. But what I have been able to convey to you about the beauty is not beauty at all. There is far more in them that is really beautiful and I am unable to speak about it. Connoisseurs and devotees may be able to discover in these passages greater beauty than I have been able to discern [or speak about].

When one's eyebrows are wrinkled in sorrow we cannot keep appreciating them. But the Ācārya is all appreciation for them [that is for Ambā's eyebrows that are wrinkled in sorrow].

Our attention is riveted by these eyebrows and we gaze at them forgetting ourselves. It means that they are not an ordinary growth of hair and that there is something great about them. The Ācārya discovers this greatness and speaks about it in the next three lines. On the whole, this is in keeping with what is conveyed at the beginning of the third line.

"Dhanur manye."

"I regard the two brows as a bow."

The bow is a curved object. The eyebrow is also arched. All poets compare brows to the bow. However, you must not make the mistake of thinking that the Ācārya is doing the same. As stated often, he sees everything from a new angle. Even when he apparently repeats the imagery already used by other poets he adds a new dimension, a new meaning, to it.

He does the same here. He does not see the eyebrows of Ambā as two separate bows. Instead he sees the two together as one bow. A bow from one end to the other need not be a single arch. Are not there bows that consist of two arches? For the Ācārya the two brows of Ambā are the two halves of the same bow. The curves of the two brows are the two halves of the same bow. When a skilled archer strings his bow, the tension caused will create vibrations that spread like waves along the string. The wrinkles formed in the brows are similar. The two eyebrows together form a single bow — "dhanur manye."

But the two brows do not meet. That is just above the tip of the nose the two brows do not meet since there is no growth of hair there. According to the Sāmudrikā-śāstra, hair growing in that area is not one of the characteristics of women belonging to a noble class. There is a saying (in Tamiḷ) : "Eyebrows joined will unjoin (ruin) the family." That Ambā has no hair between her eyebrows shows that she is a lady of an exalted type. But this fact goes against the poetic concept (that Ambā's eyebrows make a single bow). When the two brows are together likened to a bow, what about the gap between them? Is it not absurd to imagine that a bow broken like this in the middle will stay in one piece?

The gap applies not only to the stick part of the bow. The bow also consists of the string joining its two tips. In the second line the Ācārya says that Ambā's eyes which shine like bees make up the black string of the bow (consisting of her two brows). As for the string it too is broken at the bridge of her nose. That the string stays in one piece without being broken makes the entire idea of the stick of the bow and its string doubly absurd.

Here lies the Ācārya's poetic genius: in overcoming the hindrance that appears in the way that his imagination takes him. He invites trouble by imagining the eyebrows — which ought to be two separate bows — as a single one. But he overcomes it with a novel explanation for the bow being defective in that it has a gap between its two parts. He argues that it is not a defect at all.

He says that this bow belongs to Manmatha. "Ratipateḥ" — Rati's pati (husband) is Manmatha — "Ratipateḥ dhanur manye": "I think it is the bow of Manmatha."

"What is your authority for thinking so?" "Yes, I'll show you the authority." "Tvadīye netrābhyām madhukararucibhyām dhṛtaguṇam." This is the authority.

"We won't understand if you speak in Sanskrit[2]. In our land different languages are spoken in different regions. But those who speak them do not study them properly nor do they do anything to promote them. But one thing they have surely achieved. They have seen to it that Sanskrit is almost finished. So please speak in Tamiḷ."

"Tvadīye" = your; "madhukara-rucibhyām" = (that) shine like bees; "netrābhyām" = with the two eyes; "dhṛtaguṇam" = (the bow) with the string; "guṇam" means here string. Ambā's left and right eyes (the forehead eye is not taken into account here) shine like black bees. The forehead eye is red in colour, so it cannot naturally be described as a black bee. It will be dealt with in the next stanza. (You may be eager to know about the next śloka now itself). The sharp look of the two eyes which are like black bees takes in all creatures of the world. The effect of their gaze is such that the two bees that are the eyes look like an entire row of bees. When a number of individual still photographs are shown (projected on the screen) at a certain speed you see them as a continuous sequence (the principle of motion pictures)[3]. Similarly, though there are only two black bees (the two eyes) their rotating movement, together with their sparkle, create the illusion of a row of bees which, again, resembles a string made up of bees. Above that is the bow (Ambā's brows) and appropriate to it the string made up of the row of bees (as suggested in the description given above). The string of bees is part of Manmatha's bow. Remember what is mentioned in an earlier stanza (6), 'maurvī madhukaramayī.' That is why I regard it as the bow of Manmatha."

"All right. So far so good. This was the reason for your being rooted to the spot, forgetting yourself when you saw Ambā's brows. Is not Manmatha's bow sugarcane? In the brows of the World Mother flows the sweet sugarcane juice of her compassion. That is why you are unable to take your eyes off that scene. Who is it that Manmatha is going to conquer by stringing his bow?"

"Who else but Parameśvara? Any time he may become Dakṣiṇāmūrti and remain all by himself in quietude. That is why, to prevent him from doing so, Manmatha is ready with his bow stringed so that Parameśvara as Father will be with Mother (Ambā) and keep blessing the world. It is Ambā who, in her generosity, has given him such power and authority (as to make Parameśvara a victim of his arrow). He, Manmatha, is just her tool. It is to demonstrate this truth that he shows Ambā's brows and eyes as his instruments."

"Is the tangled skein of the stanza unravelled? No. We have not come to it yet and to the poetic trickery played by the Ācārya. I have not answered the question of how the bow, though broken, remains in one piece. Here is the complication and I am going to deal with it now. The Ācārya too has it in the last line of the stanza: "Prakoṣṭhe muṣṭau ca sthagayati nigūḍhāntaram Ume."

"Savyetarakakara-gṛhītam", these words in the third line must be taken together with the above. Therein lies the crux of the matter.

The stanza concludes with the word, "Ume." That is, the Ācārya is addressing the goddess. There is no snag in it, no complication. Let us see the rest.

"Prakoṣṭhe" = with the wrist; "muṣṭau ca" = and with the fists: that is the mudrā or gesture made by a wrestler, muṣṭi or the clenched fist.

In the clenched fist the two joints of the fingers press against the palm. In Tamiḷ muṣṭi is "*muṭṭi*". There is a term "*muṭṭi Pārppān*". In the past there were Brahmins who were sworn not to beg for more than one fistful of rice from any household in an agrahāra [the Brahmin quarter in a village]. "*Muṭṭi Pārppān*" refers to such a Brahmin. Nowadays the Brahmin keeps knocking at every door in search of money and comfort: that is the sort of *muṭṭi Pārppān* he is today. [*Muṭṭi* here means knocking.]

"Prakoṣṭhe muṣṭau ca" means the wrist and the fist. "Sthagayati nigūḍhāntaram": "nighūḍha antaram" means the inter-space that is not seen. "Sthagayati", keeping something hidden.

The meaning of the fourth line together with these words : "The middle part of the bow and of the string are not seen since they are hidden by Manmatha's wrist and fist."

As an archer wields his bow he holds the middle portion of its stick with his fist. Then that part, which is held by the fist, will not be seen. Similarly since his wrist comes against the string the middle part of the string also will not be visible. At a glance the stick of the bow and its string will be seen with a gap in the middle of both, but surprisingly enough the two remain in position. Only on subsequent examination will you realise that the bow and the string are not broken and that the parts that seemed broken are hidden by the wrist and fist of the archer. "The space between the eyebrows of Ambā that has no hair in it and the space between the two eyes that are obstructed by the bridge of the nose seem such as to break the bow and the string. Actually they are not broken. It is the fist and the wrist of Manmatha who is holding the bow and the string that conceal those parts." The Ācārya gives such an ingenious explanation.

Which hand is concealing the middle part of the bow and how? The right or the left? This is answered in the earlier line: "Savya-itara-kara-gṛhītam." "Savya" is right; "savya-litara-kara" means the hand that is other than the right one, that is the left hand. "Gṛhitam" means that which is held. The Ācārya speaks of Ambā's brows forming the bow held by Manmatha's left hand.

"Savya" also means left. In Sanskrit there are a number of words that have opposite meanings, "Chāyā" means both shadow and light; "śiti" means both black and white; "aghoram" denotes what is fierce as well as what is not fierce. "Nyāsam" and "sannyāsam" mean being together, or "leaving" or "renouncing". In the same way "savya" yields the meaning of left as well as right. The *Sahasranāmam* mentions a name of Ambā according to which Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī who are to her left and right fan her with fly-whisks: "Sa-cāmara-Ramā-Vāṇī-savya-dakṣiṇa-sevitā." "Daksiṇa" is right, so "savya" has to mean left here. But, generally, "savya" denotes right. The right hand is thought to be superior to the left. "Apasavyam" means not right, inauspicious, indecent. In English too right is right and left is wrong.

Here the Ācārya too refers to right as "savya." In the next stanza he says Ambā's right eye is the sun and left eye the moon. Here too he uses he word "savya" for right: "savyam tava nayanam."

"All right. Why all this explanation? Is it not enough to say that Manmatha holds the bow (the bow made up of her brows) with either of his hands, right or left?"

No, it is not enough. The middle part of the stick of the bow and the middle part of the string are hidden. We must clearly state which of the two hands the archer uses to hold the bow. The Ācārya is famous for using words economically. He is like housewives who manage their households without any waste and make proper use of things. Then why does he say "savya-itara-kara-gṛhītam" instead of merely saying "kara gṛhītam"?

"Left" can be indicated with one word, "vāmam"; instead of that the Ācārya uses "savyetaram" (other than the right). This he does deliberately. Usually archers hold their bow with their left hand and string the arrow with the right. More important than holding the bow is discharging the arrow. It is only with the right hand that we can do things facilely. Extremely skilled people have the ability to do things with their left hand also. Manmatha has such a skill. He holds the bow with his right hand, that is with his "savya-kara", not "savya-itara-kara" as mentioned here, and strings the arrow, which is the more important task, with his left hand or "savya-itara-kara". It shows that he is a great archer. Archers who hold their bows with their right hand are honoured with the name of "savyasācins."

Arjuna has this name, "Savyasācin." In the Gītā the Lord tells him: "Nimitta matram bhava Savyasācin." The bow is just an instrument in the hands of Arjuna doing the bidding of the Lord. Indeed Arjuna himself is a tool in the hands of Kṛṣṇa carrying out his will. "As a great ambidextrous archer you draw the string of your bow. But you yourself are subject to me when I make you my bow and draw your string. I am the Savyasācin of Savyasācins," the Lord condenses his concept in four words (in the Gītā).

Indra is the presiding deity of rain and the Thunderbolt, Vajrāyudha, is his admantine weapon. To prevent one from being hit by lightning a verse containing ten names of Arjuna is recited. One of the ten names is "Savyasācin."

Arjuna Phalgunaḥ Pārthaḥ Kirītī Śvetavāhanaḥ
Bhībhatsuḥ Vijayaḥ Kṛṣṇaḥ Savyasācī Dhanañjayaḥ

"Leave aside Arjuna and his story. Why bring them in? Manmatha is also a savyasācin like him. Even so the Ācārya mentions pointedly that he holds the bow (that is made of the brows of Ambā) with the hand other than savya. What is the point? Please speak about it."

I will. When an archer holds the middle part of his bow with his hand, whether the middle part of the string is hidden or not will depend on how we are watching the scene, from which side of him. Now visualise the scene for yourself. When we suppose that Manmatha bends Ambā's brows, taking them together for a bow, on which side of him are we positioned? On his left side. Amba's face is on his right. It will be the back of the head. If Ambā's face is held upright, the bow of brows will be across it. So the one who holds it also will be crosswise in relation to her. On his right, Ambā's face will hide him like a wall. So we cannot see him from that side. We will have only the left side free from where we can watch the scene freely.

When seeing him like this, suppose he is holding the bow with his right hand, we will then see the four fingers of that hand bent in, gripping the middle of the bow. So, instead of the clenched fist, we will see only the palm covered by the fingers. Even now the middle part of the bow will be hidden, but if the bow is not held tightly there is the likelihood of the middle part of the bow being revealed a little bit through the fingers. When the fingers are kept tightly together and bent in, their second and third joints will not be as closely held together as the first. If the grip on the bow is loosened a bit its middle part will show itself.

The back of the clenched fist is different from the inner part where the fingers are folded in and held together with an effort. The back of the fist is one single part as God has made it. So it serves well as a shield covering the middle part of the bow.

If Manmatha is holding the bow (made up of Ambā's brows) with his right hand we, who are on his left, will not be able to see the back of the fist which conceals well the middle part of the bow.

More important is the question of the string. The Ācārya mentions "prakoṣṭham" first, the archer's wrist hiding the middle of the string—and only after this does he speak of the fist ("muṣṭau ca") concealing the middle of the stick of the bow. The continuity of the string (the string is made up of Ambā's eyes) is broken by the bridge of the nose. This break will not be seen from our angle (when Manmatha is holding the bow with his right hand we are on his left). In our view, since his hand will be on the other side of the string, it will not be hidden by his wrist and the middle part of the string will be seen fully.

In this case the simile will go wrong. The middle of the string being concealed by the wrist of the archer cannot be compared to the fact of the space between Amba's eyes (where their continuity seems to be broken) being hidden by the nose.

Imagine that Manmatha holds the bow with his left hand. "Excellent! Excellent!" you would exclaim. Everything will be in order. The fist will hide the middle part of the bow without revealing a bit of it. The wrist holding the middle part of the string will hide it from our view.

I have, I believe, somewhat unravelled the tangle. Or is your head still in a whirl? But I suppose you will not tell me anything for fear that I will start all over again to explain the stanza! So let us go to the next stanza (48).

[The Mahāsvāmī remains silent for a while and then proceeds to speak about the next stanza.]

The sum and substance of the stanza is this. The greatness of Ambā is that she restored Manmatha to life, Manmatha who had been reduced to ashes by Īśvara. She did so because the sport of creation must go on. But people born in the process of creation become spoiled. Although Ambā by herself can save them, she thought they would like to see Mother and Father together. "Without appearing before people to bless them Īśvara keeps remaining in solitude, thus Ambā thought to herself and she flickered her eyebrows in her worry. The one who had received the gift of life from her (Manmatha) took advantage of her knitted brows, using them as his bow. He speaks as if addressing Ambā : "I will come to your help, Mother. If I keep wielding this bow, at the appropriate moment, with my arrow I can turn him (Īśvara) away from his state of detachment.The last time when I approached him with my sugarcane bow, boasting that I could do it (make love spring in Śiva's heart for Pārvatī) I was reduced to ashes. But now I will reside in your face, make a bow and string (the stick of the bow and its string) with your eyebrows and eyes. I will not fail as I did last time. There is no doubt about my success this time."

It is by being submissive to the knitting of the eyebrows by Ambā that all great deities from Brahmā to Sadāśiva become engaged in their respective functions. Let us meditate on her knitted eyebrows and seek refuge in them. Manmatha then will flee from us.

Notes & References

[1] "Vyasanin" means "one who is totally involved in some subject or work." Commentators follow this meaning of the word. But here the Gurudeva understands the word in its usual meaning of "one who is sad" about some matter. He follows the same meaning when he explains the "śoka rasa" referred to in Stanza 51 which deals with the nine rasas shown by Ambā's eyes.

[2] Here the Mahāsvāmi voices the feelings of those listening to his discourse.

[3] The Great Master is referring to the phenomenon called persistence of vision.

[4] Tastmāt tvam uttiṣṭha yaśo labhasva
Jitvā śatrūn bhuṅkṣva rājyaṁ samṛddham
Mayaiváite nihatāḥ pūrvam eva
Nimitta - mātraṁ bhava Savyasācin.
— *Bhagavādgītā,* 11.33.

Chapter 82

The Three Eyes : The Three Guṇas

The crown, the tresses of hair, the line of parting of the hair, the hair falling over the forehead, the forehead itself, the eyebrows: all these having been portrayed, Ambā's eyes are the next to be described. The eyes are of special importance to anyone. One of the endearing terms used in fondling children is "O you my eye, O you the pupil of my eye!"[1] Nobody says, "O my ear" or "O my nose"! The goddess who is famous for her sidelong glance that expresses all her compassion has many names in which the eye figures as a suffix : "Kāmākṣī", "Mīnākṣī", "Viśālākṣī", "Nīlāyatākṣī", "Añjanākṣī". In Tamiḷ too there are similar names for her: "Vaduvakir-Kaṇṇammai", "Verkaṇṇiyammai", "Veneḍunkaṇṇiyammai" and so on.

In the previous stanza (47) there was a passing reference to Ambā's eyes. The Ācārya compares them to black bees. But more importance is given in that stanza to the goddess's eyebrows. And there is no mention at all in it of her forehead eye which is of special significance to her. The Ācārya speaks of all her eyes in the present stanza (48).

Ahaḥ sūte savyam tava nayanam arkātmakatayā
Triyāmām vāmam te sṛjati rajanīnāyakatayā
Tṛtīyā te dṛṣṭiḥ daradalita-hemāmbuja-ruciḥ
Samādhatte sandhyām divasa-niśayoḥ antaracarīm

Ambā's left and right eyes are like blue lotuses and shine like two black bees. The eye between them, the eye in the forehead, is different and is like molten gold. It is indeed like fire. We must have read about Īśvara's forehead eye. When he opens it there is a blaze. The forehead eye is like fire.

The left and right eyes of Ambikā are the sun and the moon. In the (Vedic) "Puruṣasūkta" alone is it mentioned that the moon was born of the mind of the Paramapuruṣa (the Supreme Being), that the sun was born of his eye—and only the sun—and that fire was born of his mouth.

All other texts, the śāstras and Purāṇas have it that the Paramātman's right eye is the sun, that his left eye is the moon and that his forehead eye is Agni or fire.

When there is sun it is daytime. This is mentioned in the first line of the stanza. "Your right eye"—"savyam nayanam" (the "savyam" used in the previous stanza is seen here again)—having the character of the sun (arkaḥ = sun; "ātmatayā" = having his nature or character); "ahaḥ" = daytime; "sūte" = creates, so says the śloka. "Ahaḥ" means daytime. "Aharniśam", or "ahorātram", means day and night together. "Your right eye having the nature of the sun creates daytime."

In the second line the words "te vāmam" must be read with the word "nayanam" added to them. Then you get the meaning, "your left eye". "Your left eye is 'rajanī-nāyakatayā';": that is your left eye has the nature of the lord of the night, *i.e.* the moon; "triyāmam sṛjati", it creates night. A day has eight "yāmas". Of them, leaving daytime, dawn and dusk, the time of darkness is three yāmas, nine hours. So night is called "tri-yāma". "Your left eye, having the nature of the moon, creates night."

"Tritiyā te dṛṣṭiḥ" = "your third eye". Apart from the left and right eyes is the eye in the forehead, and how is it? "Daradalita:" it has the beauty of a flower just unfolding, little by little. What other special quality does it have? "Hemāṁbuja ruciḥ": it shines like a red golden lotus. "Hemāṁbuja" = golden lotus. In the temple of Mīnākṣī [in Mad(h)urai] there is a pond of golden lotuses. It is called "Svarṇapuṣkariṇī" or "Hemapuṣkariṇī". Ambā's forehead eye is a golden lotus. The reference here is not to yellow gold, what is called "*mūsā gold*", but gold that has the hue of the rose, reddish gold.

The idea that the Paramātman's right and left eyes create day and night has been expressed by many. Our Ācārya has to add something new. Others have not related the third eye to any part of the day. This is precisely what the Ācārya does here, that too in a novel way. He says that the forehead eye creates that beautiful part of the day, the morning hour or twilight, after night and before daybreak; and dusk, *i.e.* the hour before night begins. "Divasa-niśayoh antaracarīm sandhyām samādhatte."

"Divasam" means daytime. But, usually, words like "divasam", "dinam", the Tamil *"nāl"* and the English "day" denote a full day, the 24-hour period including daytime and night. This may be because it is during daytime that we do most of our work; we spend most of the night in sleep. In Tamiḷ *"tevaśam"*, from "divasam", is used to denote śrāddha, the day of the manes (pitṛdina).

After speaking about daytime and night, can "sandhyā" be left out? Hiraṇyakaśipu received a boon according to which he was not to die either during day or at night. The Lord ingeniously used the time of sandhyā to "finish him off". There are two sandhyās, "prātaḥ sandhyā" and "sāyam sandhyā", dawn and dusk. During these two sandhyās our minds are naturally absorbed in the Paramātman. Sandhyāvandana is the backbone of our religious observances. Can we fail to perform it? If Ambā's right and left eyes create daytime and night, has not the eye between them (the forehead eye) necessarily to create the two sandhyās, dawn and dusk? The skies during dawn and dusk are red and the forehead eye of Ambā is a golden red. So there is no doubt that the two sandhyās are created by the eye in her forehead.

That Ambā is Time personified is explained by the Ācārya as he deals with her eyes.

Ambā's eyes do not stop with creating the different periods of the day. The Ācārya says in another stanza (53) that they create even the deities in charge of creation, sustenance and dissolution. Here all the three eyes are spoken of together, the forehead eye not being mentioned separately. The three eyes have each a different colour, red, white and black, and they represent the three guṇas, rajas, sattva and tamas. After the deluge it is from these eyes that Ambā creates the deities for the conduct of cosmic affairs : Brahmā who is rājasik, Viṣṇu who is sāttvik, and Rudra who is tāmasik, to perform the functions of creation, sustenance and dissolution.

Although the function of dissolution is mentioned here, in another stanza (55), the Ācārya wonders whether he should speak of Ambā, who is Mother, as causing the deluge. So he states: "When you shut your eyes the world will perish. When you open them it will rise again. With your heart of a Mother you now feel that the world that has risen must not be dissolved. That is why you remain without closing your eyes." That the celestials do not close their eyes is well known. Celestials like Indra came disguising themselves as Nala for the svayamvara of Damayantī. Damayantī was able to make out the true Nala from the fact that his feet touched the ground and that he blinked his eyes. The Ācārya says very beautifully that Ambā does not wink her eyes because she thinks if she does so the world will perish. He speaks thus in appreciation of a Mother's heart.

The Ācārya gives a description (in Stanza 54) of the three colours in the eyes of Ambā which are different from what we have already seen, the three colours which are the source of the three guṇas. The Gaṅgā looks white in colour: the river originating in the hair of the white-complexioned Śiva. The Yamunā is dark. "Kāla" is dark as in the word "kāla-megha" (dark cloud). The Yamunā is also called "Kālindī" and it is associated with Kṛṣṇa which name also means dark. There is a third river (an invisible one) which is an underground stream joining the above two at Prayāga and it is called Sarasvatī. The Ācārya speaks of the Śonā, not of the Sarasvatī. The reason is it is red, the word "śona" itself means red. The redness of what we call "aruṇa" is śoṇā. If the Gaṅgā stands for Śiva, the Yamunā for Viṣṇu, Śoṇā stands for Ambā. Ambā's pet son is Vighneśvara. In the Śoṇā river you obtain the red stone called "Śoṇabhadra" which represents Vighneśvara. In this river called Sone [by Northerners] I have bathed and gathered from it a number of Śoṇabhadra stones. Ambā's eyes have the white look, the black look and the red look; they are the confluence of the three sacred rivers of the Gaṅgā, the Yamunā and the Śonā. So they are sinless, "anagha". ("Agham" = sin; "anagham" = without sin, virtuous.) May Ambā's glance, which is the confluence of the three sacred rivers, wash away our sins and make us pure, so prays the Ācārya. "Pavitrīkartum naḥ": here too, as usual, he uses the plural "naḥ" . He prays on behalf of all of us. It is a universal prayer made by our Ācārya who represents the pinnacle of sanctity.

Note

1 This literal translation from the Tamiḷ sounds clumsy. In idiomatic English one says "the apple of my eye".

Chapter 83

Netra and Kṣetra

Apparsvāmigal[g] has composed a *Tiruttāṇdagam*[1] called *Kṣettira Kovai* stringing together the names of a number of places. In the same way, the Ācārya has composed a stanza on places (49), each name having two meanings.

Viśālā Kalyāṇī sphuṭarucir Ayodhyā Kuvalayaiḥ
Kṛpādhārādhārā kimapi Madhurā Bhogavatikā
Avantī dṛṣṭiste bahunagara-vistāra-vijayā
Dhruvam tattannāma-vyavaharaṇa-yogyā vijayate.

Everybody would know that Ayodhyā, Dhārā, Bhojarājā's capital, Avantī (Ujjayinī is the same) are the names of cities. "Viśālā" which comes first in the stanza is also the name of a place: it is another name for Badarināth. Devotees chant there: "Jay Badarī-Viśāl!" There is a place called Kalyāṇī: it is now called Kalyāṇ and it is north of Bombay [Mumbai]. But there is also another Kalyāṇī which is in Bidār district, Karṇāṭaka. It was the capital of what was called Kuntaladeśa during the Ācārya's time. In later centuries the Cālūkyas of Vātāpi, after their fall, rose again as the Cālūkyas of Kalyāṇī and ruled from this city.

Bhogavatī is another city. We have come to know that what is now called Kambat in Gujarāt was Bhogavatī. "Cambay" must be the anglicised form of Kambat. The arm of the Arabian Sea there is called the Gulf of Cambay. "Bay" and "gulf" are portions of the sea that seem to encroach into land or fill wide openings in it. A bay is wider than a gulf. The Bay of Bengāḷ that stretches between India and Burma is big in area while the Gulf of Mannār is a narrow strip of sea between India and Śrī Laṅkā. Though there is "bay" in Cambay, the reference is to a gulf and not to a bay. The once famous port town of Kambat is Bhogavatī.

"Vijayā" does not refer to Hampi Vijayanagara in Bellāry district, Karṇāṭaka; nor does it to the Vijayanagara principality of Śrīkākulam district, Āndhra Pradeś, ruled by the famous Gajapati rājās. In the old days the one was distinguished from the other by being differently spelt: the former as "Vijayā" and the latter as "Viziya" (or "Vizia"). I don't know how it is now. Hampi Vijayanagara was the capital of the famous Vijayanagara Empire. It was originally named by Bukkarāya after its founder Śrī Vidyāraṇyasvāmī. Then it came to be changed to Vijayanagara. The city was built in mid-14th century. The other Vijayanagara in Āndhra Pradeś is also not known to have existed during the Ācārya's time. So the Vijayā mentioned by him must be some other ancient city. Perhaps Kurukṣetra. The Gītā concludes with the statement: "Wherever Kṛṣṇa is, wherever Arjuna is, there is Vijaya (victory)[2]." Was it not in Kurukṣetra that Kṛṣṇa taught Arjuna the Gītā? Arjuna is also called "Vijaya" and Kṛṣṇa blessed him with victory (vijaya) in the war.

The eight cities thus listed are not ordinary places. They are famous centres, "kṣetras." But what is their connection with Ambā? Her glance takes in the entire cosmos. It is also cast on all big cities and thereby wins over all those living in them with her compassion. A rājā takes up arms, lays siege to cities and achieves victory over them. As for Ambā she keeps enlarging her empire by casting her compassionate glance on city after city, town after town. Thus, although she conquers many a city, many a place, eight of them are important because of their receiving her special grace. Their names are mentioned in the stanza. We must note here that the names of these cities speak of what distinguishes Ambā's glance, its characteristics. Thus the Ācārya has resorted to the figure of speech according to which the words yield two meanings.

The names of the eight cities, "Viśālā", "Kalyāṇī", "Ayodhyā" and so on, are associated with Ambā's dṛṣṭi, her glance or look. The commentators have given accurate definitions of "Viśāla-dṛṣṭi", "Kalyāṇa-dṛṣṭi" and so on. But I don't remember them now. I will speak about them according to their generally understood meaning.

Since Ambā's glance is wide-ranging it is called "Viśālā" and since it creates the well-being of all the world it is known as "Kalyāṇī."

"Ayodhyā" literally means that which cannot be defeated in war, invincible. The rulers of the Ikṣvāku dynasty built fortresses and made the city impregnable. We may also explain the meaning of the name thus: "No enemy king ever dared to invade the city and capture it, so it does not know what is war—and thus Ayodhyā." How is this name related to Ambā's glance? Since dṛṣṭi, glance, originates in the eye it is also referred to as the eye. The eye is usually compared to the kuvala or the kuvalaya, the blue water-lily: we read about "kuvala eyes", "eyes equal in beauty to kuvalaya flowers". The upamāna [that with which something is compared] is sometimes sought to be downgraded by the upameya [the subject of comparison]. In this manner we say, "eyes that scoff at kuvalaya flowers". This depreciation takes an "aggressive" form when we say, "eyes that conquer kuvalaya flowers". The Ācārya here expresses the idea that Ambā's eyes are not capable of being conquered by kuvalaya flowers. He uses the word "Ayodhyā" for that which cannot be conquered: "Ayodhyā kuvalayaiḥ".

Ambā's glance is the source of a rain of compassion. The name of the city of Dhārā comes twice in the words, "Kṛpā-dhārā-ādhārā". [The second "Dhārā" is in "ādhārā".] Is not Dhāra the city of Bhoja who was famous for his largesse? The words suggest that Ambā's compassion may be obtained in flow after flow.

Ambā is the embodiment of sweetness. How nectarine must be her glance? That is why it is called "madhurā". Mathurā is a city in the North. The city of which we in the South are proud, Mad(h)urai, was the capital of the Pāṇḍyas. [The Mahāsvāmi says, with childlike pride, "our Madurai."]

They say Bhogavatī is a place in Prayāga. The capital of the nether-world and the Gaṅgā that flows there are both known as Bhogavatī. The Gaṅgā flows not only in this world but also in the celestial world and the nether-world. In the celestial world it is called Mandākinī, in this world it is Bhāgīrathī and in the nether world it is Bhogavatī. But since the Ācārya speaks in these stanzas only of the cities of this world, there is no point in bringing in the Gaṅgā of the nether world or its capital city. Bhogavatī must be what is now known as Kambat.

How does the name Bhogavatī relate to Ambā's glance? The word means that which is fit to be enjoyed. What greater joy can there be than that derived from Ambā's glance falling upon us? So it is indeed Bhogavatī. It gives pleasure to Īśvara, so in that sense also the name is appropriate.

"Avantī" means that which protects (act of protecting). The term, "māmava" occurs in a number of (Carṇātic) musical compositions. "Māmava" = "mām ava" = "protect me." "Ava" means "protect" and "avanam" is protection; and "Avantī" is the act of protecting. Ambā's glance is a big protection, hence "Avantī". Ujjayinī, Vikramāditya's capital, is also called Avantī. Both the kingdom and its capital have the same name, "Avantī". So as to avoid any confusion, it is said, Avantī came to mean the kingdom and Ujjayinī, the capital. This Avantī (Ujjayini) also had the name of "Viśālā".

Ayodhyā, Mathurā (let us assume the Northern city) and Avantī are three of the seven mokṣa-puris (cities of liberation).

I have already spoken about Vijayā. Since Ambā makes a triumphant tour of the cities her glance is Vijayā: "bahunagara-vistāra-vijayā."

Even if Ambā's glance falls on all the cities of the world, the eight mentioned in the stanza are special since they have the distinction of being named after the qualities of her dṛṣṭi like Viśālā, Kalyāṇa and so on. In pursuance of poetic beauty, the Ācārya changes this and says that Ambā's glance merits being known after the names of these cities: "Tat tat nāma vyavaharaṇa-yogyā vijayate". "All those cities that receive the glance of Ambā in the course of her wide-ranging triumphant tour, those glances shine as deserving of being called after them."

"Nayanam" means "leading". It is because the eye shows the way that we are able to walk (to move about). It means it is our leader. The leader is called "nāyaka" and the word is related to "naya". "Neta" also means one who is in the forefront and shows the way. They speak of "Netāji Bose"[3]. "Netra" and "neta" are related words like "nayana" and "nāyaka". With the help of Ambā's eyes that lead us on the path of śreyas[g], the Ācārya undertakes a countrywide pilgrimage through this stanza.

Notes & References

[1] *Tiruttaṇḍagam* : The devotional songs *(Tevāram)* sung by Tirunāvukkaraśu (Appar) forms part of the 4th, 5th and 6th *Tirumurai*. These songs are in praise of Śiva. Appar is also known as *"Tāṅdaka - Vendar"*, as the author of the *Tandaga* verses.

2 Yatra yogeśvaraḥ Kṛṣṇo yatra Partho dhanurdharaḥ
Tatra śrīr vijayo bhūtir dhruvā-nītir matir mama
— *Bhagavadgītā*, 18. 78.

3 Subhās Candra Bose, great patriot, who formed the Indian National Army abroad to fight for our freedom.

Chapter 84

Ambā's Eyes and Poetry

In the next stanza (50) the Ācārya relates Ambā's eyes directly to poetry.

Kavīnām sandarbha-stabaka-makarandaika-rasikam
Kaṭākṣa-vyākṣepa-bhramarakalabhau karṇayugalam
Amuñcantau dṛṣṭvā tava navarasāsvāda-taralau
Asūyā-saṁsargādalikanayanam kiñcidaruṇam

"Asūyā saṁsargāt" : because of jealousy. Who is jealous? Jealous of what or of whom? In the presence of Parāśakti how can there be jealousy?

The jealousy is in Ambā's own eyes. More correctly one eye is jealous of the other two. "Alikam" = forehead. "Alika -nayanam" = the forehead eye. The third eye is jealous and has become bloodshot, a little red, because of it. "Kiñcit" = a little bit; "aruṇam" = red.

Poets wonder why that eye is red and try to explain the fact by saying that Ambā's left and right eyes are the moon and the sun and that her third eye is fire and therefore red. This is not entirely correct. If you say that the eye in the forehead is fire and therefore red, what about the other two eyes? The right eye [following this logic] must have some sign to denote that it is the sun and the left eye similarly must have some sign to show that it is the moon. But in the case of both you do not see any signs [to show what they are]. The right eye that should be burning like the sun and the left eye that should be raining moonlight are entirely alike: and the two rain the nectar of Ambā's sidelong glances. So we cannot accept the view that the third eye should be red since, metaphorically speaking, it is fire.

The Ācārya gives a reason for the third eye being red and it is different from that given by ordinary poets. What does he say?

In the beginning all three eyes were the same colour, that is they were like black water-lilies. Now the forehead eye alone has changed to red. When one becomes jealous or envious one's face becomes red, does it not? Similarly, Ambā's third eye has been affected by jealousy. In fact it is intensely affected by jealousy. That is why it has become red, observes the Ācārya.

"Is such an explanation adequate? If the eye of jñāna of the Supreme Being (Ambā) is affected by jealousy, the reasons for the same must be given, how, why and so on. It must be proved point by point; only then can we accept the view that the eye is burning with jealousy."

"That's all you need? The eye in the forehead is indeed jealous of the other two eyes and it can be easily proved." And it is in pursuance of this idea that the Ācārya has composed the stanza.

As great poets compose hymns to Ambā, hymns that arouse our sense of wonder, she listens intently to them. Being a great rasikā, connoisseur, her ears imbibe the rasa of these hymns with such great interest as to make one think that they have assumed a special shape for the purpose. The concatenation of place, meaning, and so on that creates a favourable atmosphere for something is understood as "sandarbha". Any weaving together of factors is sandarbha. Thus when the characters of the story told by a poem, the events and the various emotional states it describes and the ideas thrown up by the poet's imagination, the words and metre he employs are woven together, the resultant literary work is "sandarbha". In the present stanza the term refers to such poetic compositions, "stabakas", brought together by poets. A "stabaka" is a bunch of flowers, a nosegay. Here it means a bouquet of words. A bunch of flowers also means the nectar exuded by it. Thus from the poetic nosegay flow the nine rasas[g] as nectar. This nectar is the only sustenance for the ear of Ambā personified. "He" (the ear personified) does not eat anything else. "Makaranda rasikam— makaranda eka rasikam" : this nectar is the only thing that "he" takes with relish.

The Ācārya uses the term "makarandaika rasikam" in an earlier stanza (38) in which he speaks of Śiva and Śakti residing as a pair of hamsas in the anāhata cakra. He mentions that they imbibe with relish the nectar in the lotus of jñāna called "samvit". Indeed they take in nothing other than this nectar: "Samunmīlat samvitkamala-makarandaika rasikam."

The two ears that take delight in imbibing the nectar [poetic rasa] produced by great poets is referred to in this stanza (50) as "karṇayugalam". But why is so much importance given to the ears in the context of dealing with the eyes? There is a reason.

What are the right and left eyes of Ambā like? They are usually described as *"kātalavodiyavai"* (in Tamiḷ). In Sanskrit they are said to be "karṇānta-viśrānta-netram". The Supreme Being's eyes are so long that they touch the ears. If you happen to touch a cup brimming with honey, is not the next step of yours that of drinking it? Thus the eyes that touch the ear-cups of Ambā that are brimful of nectar become engrossed in imbibing it, tasting the sweet flavour of poetry. "Amuñcantau," says the Ācārya : the eyes refuse to be parted from the ears and remain sticking to them. Ambā's left and right eyes send their glances to their corners and through them start partaking of the poetic nectar with which her ears are filled. The glances are appropriately enough called little black bees. In a previous stanza the Ācārya says that the string of bees (of Manmatha's bow) is made up of Ambā's glances. "Bhramara" means bee. In Śrīśaila, Ambā is called "Bhramarāmbikā", meaning "Bee Mother" ("Vaṇḍamma" in Tamiḷ). Why Bee Mother? Because the Father there is the Mallika flower (jasmine), Mallikārjuna. Ambā as Bhramarāmbā buzzes around the flower and imbibes the nectar of Śivānanda. "Bhramara-kalabhau". "Kalabha" is a young one. When one is young one has the tendency to keep eating all the time. The hunger of Ambā's eyes for the nectar of poetry is insatiable. That is why they are called "Bhramara-kalabhau".

In this Ambā practises a little bit of deception. She has the responsibility of curbing the world's tāpa and pāpa (suffering and sinfulness). It is in the midst of carrying out this duty that she is lured by the beauty of the compositions of great poets. She would earn a bad name if she were to be guilty of dereliction of duty and keep listening to the songs of the poets. She thinks about it, and what she does is indeed a little bit of deception. "Let my sidelong glance be my blessing. The ambrosia of the sidelong glance will assuage the world's suffering and sinfulness. At the same time I can keep imbibing the nectar of poetry." Thus she achieves her twin objective by performing a single task.

"Kaṭākṣa vyākṣepa": "vyākṣepa" is a kind of deceit, a pretext; kaṭākṣa" is the corner of the eye, sidelong glance. The sidelong glance has a special distinction. Greater value is attached to looking at a thing tenderly with the corner of the eye than looking straight at it; it has also greater beauty and greater grace. Kaṭākṣa is *"Kaṭai kaṇ"* in Tamiḷ. We always pray that a deity deigns to bless us with his/her sidelong glance.

"It's all for the good," Ambā thinks to herself. "It is only when the bees that are my glances go near my ears can they partake of the honey of the literary nosegay of the poets, 'kavīnām-sandarbha-stabaka-makarandam'. At the same time, since they go up to the corners of my eyes, it will mean that my blessings are granted to the world through my sidelong glances. Instead of abandoning my duty of protecting the world so that I can listen to poetry and music, it will mean delighting myself in the beauty of literary compositions and at the same time of doing the duty of protecting the world through my sidelong glances," thus thinking Ambā knots together the two (protecting the world and listening to poetry) into a single act.

Under the pretext of her sidelong glances — there is a trick or a bit of deceit in saying so—Ambā relishes the rasa of poetry: this is said in fun and in doing so the Ācārya has his poetic licence with a view to enhancing the beauty of the passage in question. As a matter of fact, even though we do not deserve the compassion bestowed by the goddess through her sidelong glance, she rains it without any reason for the same. So it is said that she is "avyāja-kṛpā-kaṭākṣī" ["Avyāja - karuṇā - mūrti"]. The purpose here is to speak about her high aesthetic sense. The Ācārya indulges in a bit of fun by stating that Ambā blesses the world under the pretext of listening to poetry.

Let that be. What about the jealousy of the third eye?

It is only the left and right eyes that reach up to the ears. So they can, on the pretext of bestowing Ambā's sidelong glances, manage to reach up to her ears and partake of the nectar of poetry. As for the third eye it is situated vertically in the forehead. Its look can take in the space between the eyebrows and the point of the parting of the hair. There is no question of its glance reaching up to the ears.

When the left and right eyes, through their glances (that are bees), are able to become sated with the nectar of the poetry dedicated to Īśvara, the nectar that comes flooding, the forehead eye feels sad that it alone cannot have even a droplet of that nectar. So it becomes jealous of the other two eyes. And from jealousy springs anger which tinges the eye with a little red.

"It is not the eye of fire or any such thing. It is envy that has made Ambā's forehead eye red," observes the Ācārya and puts forward his points to prove his statement.

That Ambā takes delight in the hymns in praise of Īśvara is not actually supported by this stanza. Such an idea somehow occurred to me. In two stanzas that come later (60 and 66) there is mention of Ambā taking delight in Sarasvatī playing the vīṇā. In one of them (66) occurs the words, "vividham apadānam Paśupateḥ": Sarasvatī sings the many sports of Paśupati as she plays the vīṇā. I had this in mind when I spoke about Ambā taking delight in the hymns in praise of Īśvara. This is a subject that deserves to be elaborated upon separately.

The other stanza (60) which says that Ambā takes delight in Sarasvatī singing — "Sarasvatyāḥ sūktīḥ amṛtalaharī kauśalaharīḥ"— starts with a line in which the word "laharī" comes twice. We have already dealt with Ānandalaharī, Saundaryalaharī, Cidañandalahari and Śṛṅgāralaharī. Here, though two more "laharīs" are apparently added, in reality there is only one, the other being part of word play. "Amṛtalaharī" is truly one of the laharīs. But "kauśalaharī" is not to be split into "kauśa" and "laharī": It is "kauśala" and "harī".

"Amrtalaharī" is a flood of ambrosia. Sarasvatī's "sūkti" is her sweet speech. ("Sūkti", "sūkta" = su = uktam, well-spoken. The Vedic hymns are sūktas: "Puruṣasūkta", "Śrīsūkta", "Rudrasūkta" "Durgāsūkta" and so on.) Sarasvatī's speech is such as to detract from the excellence of the ambrosia even when it comes as a flood, in other words it is sweeter than ambrosia. This is the meaning of "amṛtalaharī kauśala-harī". "Kauśala" is skill or excellence; "harī" is stealing or robbing. Ambā's ears which were earlier described as relishing the honey of the hymns of poets, the Ācārya now describes as the "culukā" to contain Sarasvatī's sūktis. A culukā is a small water-pot. The Ācārya gives culukā here the form of a person. When Ambā shakes her head in appreciation of Sarasvatī's music, her ear-ornaments jingle. This, says the Ācārya, stands for the appreciation expressed by the "ear-man" in response to Sarasvatī's singing.

Chapter 85

The Eye : Abode of the Nine Rasas

After mentioning how the eyes delight themselving in the nine rasas[g], the Ācārya describes how they (the eyes) themselves express these rasas on different occasions (Stanza 51).

Śive śṛṅgārārdrā taditarajane kutsanaparā
Saroṣa Gaṅgāyām Giriśacarite vismayavatī
Harāhibhyo bhītā sarasiruha-saubhāgya-jananī
Sakhīṣu smera te mayi janani dṛṣṭiḥ sakaruṇā

All emotional states or rasas are revealed through the eyes. The eyes reflect all feelings and urges. No emotion, no feeling, can be shown through the ears. The lips quivering in a particular manner may show anger or sorrow. When you laugh there is a particular kind of lip and facial movement. When you draw breath noisily it means that you are sorrowful, that you are sobbing. However, the eyes alone can reveal all your emotions. Love or desire, sorrow or anger, valour or disugst, envy or fear—and śāntā or tranquillity—all these are revealed by the eyes as a mirror of the mind. Karuṇa among the rasas of dramaturgy denotes śoka or sorrow. This karuṇa as well as the karuṇā or compassion of the Lord or Ambā revealed through their sidelong glances is also expressed by the eyes. When an artist paints a portrait he has to depict the eyes with care so as to reveal the mental state of the subject of the portrait, his or her feelings. If the look of the eye is changed a bit the expression too will change. In the same way a dancer (or an actor or actress) must portray the feelings of a character or enact a scene with proper eye movements.

The Ācārya speaks here of all the nine rasas flowing from the eyes of Parāśakti who conducts the drama of the world. When do they fill with śṛṅgāra rasa, the sentiment of love or the erotic mood. Everybody knows the answer to this. Ambā's śṛṅgāra is only for Parameśvara: "Śive śṛṅgārārdrā."

"Ārdrā" means "one who is wet, drenched". Ambā is drenched in her love for Śiva—"Śive śṛṅgārārdrā." She bathes Śiva who is as white as crystal in the brilliance of her red and makes him an embodiment of love, states the Ācārya in another stanza (92).

You desire to possess an object when you see it—this is śṛṅgārā. Quite the opposite of this is to feel revulsion for it when you see it. The opposite of śṛṅgāra is not raudra born of anger. Śṛṅgāra has no reason behind it. They say "Love is blind." A millipede does not do us any harm, but we shrink from it in disgust for no reason. This is the opposite of śṛṅgāra and it is bhībhatsa rasa (disgust).

We are so full of impurities and undesirable qualities that Ambā should shrink from us in revulsion. But she is our Mother and she keeps us close to herself. Does she at any time betray feelings of bhībhatsa, that is disgust? Yes. If those belonging to the male sex, save Iśvara himself, approach her in an attitude other than that of regarding themselves as her children, she is unable to resist her feelings of revulsion and her eyes betray bhībhatsa. Śiva himself once came to her in disguise to test her and spoke ill of himself. She could not stand it and the feelings of bhībhatsa she felt at the time is described beautifully by Kālidāsa in his *Kumārasaṁbhavam*.

"Tat itara jane kutsana parā": "tat-itara" = other than Śiva; "jana" = with all people; "kutsana-parā" = has disgust; "kutsana" means the same as bhībhatsa. On such occasions her look will betray bhībhatsa. Or she will reveal her disgust by closing her eyes.

When do Ambā's eyes reveal raudra (intense anger)?

"Saroṣā Gaṅgāyām."

"Roṣa" and "raudra" are the same. Īśvara has "another woman", Gaṅgā, and he holds her on his head. Anger wells up in Ambā only when she sees Gaṅgā. It is due to hatred for a *cakkalatti.* "Kalatrī" means wife; "sakalatrī" is another wife; and "sakalatrī" has changed to '*'cakkalattī*" [in Tamiḷ]. Her husband Śiva has given half of his body to Ambā but he holds Gaṅgā on his head [in his matted hair]. Ambā is not angry with her husband for this. After all, she is a pativratā[g] and her anger is directed against Gaṅgā. The Ācārya speaks of Ambā taking her in this context for a human being [or as one with attitudes and emotions that are human].

"Adbhuta" is another rasa. It is the sense of wonder or marvel aroused by something. When is it revealed in Ambā's eyes? "Giriśa-carite vismayati." "Vismayam" is amazement. "Giriśa" and "Girīśa" are two among the names of Śiva. Girīśa means king of the Kailasa mountain and Giriśa means one who resides on that mountain. Ambā is lost in wonder as she listens to the story of Kailāsanātha, that is Śiva. When she listens to accounts of his sport, when she thinks of them, remembers them, she is seized by wonder. There is no end to the sport of Śiva. Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita has composed a long poem called *Śivalīlārṇavam*. "Arṇavam" means ocean. The slaying of Tripura, the burning of Manmatha, the killing of Gajāsura (elephant demon), the destruction of Kāla, the slaying of the demon Antaka, swallowing the poison called Hālāhala, all these are part of the story of Śiva, as also his role as a mendicant, his tāṇḍava dance as Naṭarāja, his sport of Hālāsya: as many as 64 kinds of sport or līlā, or more, are told of him. It is from such a lake of stories that Śivānandalaharī rises, observes the Ācārya in his hymn so named. The one who has no function to perform, the one who is quiescent, came to be involved in many a sport and, according to the *Saundaryalaharī,* it was Ambā who activated him in this manner. If Ambā is lost in wonder for Śiva's sport, we are lost in wonder as we think of Ambā making Śthāṇunātha perform such sport—Sthāṇuanātha, one who is like a dry log of wood.

Then comes the rasa "bhayānaka", fearful or terrible [that which causes fear or terror]. Ambā is the personification of abhaya and the refuge of all of us who die of fear for one reason or another. We saw in an earlier stanza (4) that her feet grant vara and abhaya (boons and freedom from fear). In Māyavaram she is called "Abhayāṁbikā." How can one like her be subject to fear herself?

Yes, she can be. It is all part of her sport. There is a snake, Nāga, entwining the Śivaliṅga. It is in fact Ambā herself. In each individual she dwells as the snake called Kuṇḍalinī. Even so it seems she trembles as she sees the snakes worn by Parameśvara. Showing such fear is part of her sport. "Harāhibhyo bhītā": "Hara", (that of) Īśvara; "ahibhyo", of snakes;, "bhitā", being afraid.

Then the Ācārya comes to vīra rasa. Ambā was vīrā, valour or heroism, incarnate during her exploits like the slaying of Mahiṣāsura, Bhaṇḍāsura and others. But the Ācārya seems reluctant to associate Ambā with deeds of violence. So he says that Ambā's eyes betray vīra rasa in vanquishing the lustre of the lotus. But not exactly so. Perhaps the Ācārya does not want to suggest anything like a quarrel by saying that she "vanquishes the lustre of the lotus" [he does not want to suggest any violence on the part of Ambā]. So he says, instead, that Ambā is the one who brings forth the lustre of the lotus: "Sarasiruha-saubhāgya-jananī." Red colour itself indicates valour, vīra rasa. So if it is said that she creates the red colour in the lotus, it means that "she showers" vīra rasa. Eminent scholars have interpreted the idea thus.

There is another version of the text in which "jayinī" is used instead of "jananī." "Jayinī" reminds us of the latter part of the name of the city, "Ujjayinī." In this version Ambā's valour is clearly indicated by the statement that she "triumphs over the lustre of the lotus."

Whether we say that Ambā's eyes create the beauty of the lotus or that they triumph over that beauty, in either case the eyes have a part in them and for this reason specially noteworthy. What we saw until now was that the rasas were reflected in Ambā's eyes as reactions to things external to them. But now the beauty of the lotus, or of Ambā's eyes triumphing over it, is the "direct action" of those eyes.

What about hāsya rasa, mirth? They speak of comedy --and life is so full of tragedy that we yearn for mirth, for humour. The Ācārya deals with this rasa also. "Sakhīṣu smerā": Ambā creates mirthfulness as she speaks to her companions and her speech is mingled with laughter. The twinkle in her eyes on such occasions is usually referred to as her mischievous look.

So far we have seen seven of the nine rasas : love, disgust, wrathfulness, wonder, terror, valour and mirth. Two more remain — śoka that is karuṇa and śānta.

Ambā who is the personification of bliss enacted the rasas mentioned so far as part of her sport. The Ācārya is unable to speak in the same manner about the śoka rasa enacted by her eyes. During the sacrifice conducted by Dakṣa she [as Satī] gave way to grief and was indeed inconsolable. In a number of Purāṇas there are accounts of Īśvara cursing her for one reason or another and of her going to him in tears asking him his forgiveness. But the Bhagavatpāda does not have the heart to retell stories connected with these incidents. In a previous stanza (47) he speaks about how Ambā was sad that people involved in worldly existence were full of fear and how she banishes their fear (frees them from it). It means that because of her compassion she becomes a little sorrowful. In this stanza he integrates Ambā's compassion with her sorrow, integrates karunā (compassion) with karuṇa (śoka), "Bhuvanabhayabhaṅga-vyasanini". If Ambā rains her karuṇā rasa on an individual what is implied in it? "Poor man," she exclaims, thinking of him. She sympathises with him and lifts him up. When she sees a man in great sorrow, that is in the state of karuṇa or soka, out of sympathy for him she showers on him her sidelong glance of karuṇā (compassion). In her sympathy for the man it comes about that she shares his śoka or karuṇa rasa. So in this subtle fashion the Ācārya shows how she experiences śoka by means of her karuṇā or compassion. And, at the same time, he says all this in a profoundly touching manner. The Ācārya himself, because of his sympathy and compassion for suffering mankind, becomes their "spokesman" and prays to Ambā on their behalf for her compassion.

"Te mayi, Janani, dṛṣṭiḥ sakaruṇā."

"O Mother, may your glance, which shows different rasas, be full of compassion for me."

In earlier stanzas we saw that the Ācārya, whenever he prayed to Ambā, did so for all of us, using the word "naḥ." Why does he here ask for compassion only for himself while praying to Ambā in his state of distress. He uses the word "mayi" ("for me"). There is a deep inner meaning in this. Here he represents all mankind. So what apparently seems a prayer for a single individual like himself is in reality a prayer on behalf of everybody. By making all recite this stanza he makes them deserving specially of her compassionate sidelong glance. This karuṇā rasa of Ambā alone is related to the one who prays to her, the rest of the rasas reflected in her eyes being due to other causes.

How is it that the stanza is complete with eight of the nine rasas only? What about the ninth?

Savouring the eight rasas as an aesthetic experience and empathising oneself with the states represented by them will itself mean śānta rasa, the mood of tranquillity. Ambā herself is basically an embodiment of tranquillity; she is in the state of Śiva. In fact the word "Śive" in this stanza denotes śānta. The Ācārya, who says at the very beginning of the hymn (Stanza 1) that without Śakti Śiva remains still and serene, begins the present stanza with "Śive." By this a great truth is proclaimed that it is this state of quietude and tranquillity (śānta) that pulsated and evolved into the eight rasas. The idea underlying the hymn throughout is that Ambā is the functioning Brahman; so the Ācārya must have thought of hinting at śānta in this oblique manner.

The very first stanza of the hymn starts with "Śiva" and this stanza which begins with "Śive" is the 51st of the hymn, which means half of the hymn is completed with it. Among the four Vedas, the name of Śiva occupies a central, commanding, place: the Ācārya has blessed us with the *Saundaryalaharī* which likewise, has the same name occupying a central position.

"There are only eight rasas. There is in fact no such rasa as śānta at all. A rasa implies linking of a number of factors: the one who experiences it, the experience itself, the accompanying emotion and its arousal, the subject that causes it. Śānta is admittedly a great experience. It is a quiet and serene state, a state of equanimity in which all emotions are submerged. How can it be called a rasa, then?" some authorities on poetics ask. But there is another school of aesthetics according to which śānta too, like other rasas, is produced by special circumstances and that it has its own background and other factors that cause it. They also mention the signs indicating it and the upa-bhāvas (the subsidiary bhāvas) of this basic bhāva[g]. "This too is a rasa," they declare. "In fact it is the rasa among rasas."

In the previous stanza, the Ācārya speaks of "navarasāsvāda-taralau." If he mentions in the present stanza how the rasas of dramaturgy are reflected in the eyes of Ambā, it is logical for him to include śānta also among them. There is another confirmation of this point and it is afforded by the next stanza (52). In it the Ācārya says that Manmatha makes Ambā's glance itself his arrow and, discharging it at Śiva, drives away the Lord's mood of tranquillity (śānta rasa). "Purāṁ bhettuḥ cittapraśama-rasa-vidrāvaṇa": "by driving away the 'praśama' in the mind of Śiva, the Purāri." "Śama" means containment of the mind and the word "śānti" is derived from it. We speak of "praśanti" which is taking śānti many steps higher. In the same way "praśama" is a few degrees higher than "śama." "Praśama rasa" is of course śānta rasa.

Earlier when the Ācārya spoke about Ānandabhairava and Ānandabhairavī dancing together in the mūlādhāra he referred to "navarasamahātāṇḍava" (Stanza 41). So it is proved beyond doubt that the Ācārya accepted the concept of the nine rasas. However, it seems he has not elaborated upon the śānta rasa with regard to Ambā because if she, who is Śakti, were to become tranquil she would cease to have vibrations and she would herself become one like Śiva as mentioned in the first stanza.

If some maintain that there are only eight rasas, some others believe that there are ten including, apart from śānta, the rasa of "vātsalya" [affection as shown between parents and children]. They think it is "weighty" enough to be thought of as a rasa. There is vātsalya in the Ācārya addressing Ambā as "Mother" and regarding himself as a child of hers "mayi, Janani, dṛṣṭih sakaruṇā."

The Ācārya shows his genius by speaking explicitly about eight of the ten rasas [ten including śānta and vātsalya] and hinting at the remaining two rasas that are associated with just one part of Ambā's body [that is her eyes].

Chapter 86

"Mīnalocanā"—Hinted At

Among the many beauties hinted at, in the *Saundaryalaharī,* Mīnākṣī is one and she is also connected with the eyes. Is not Mīnākṣī the same as "Mīnanetrī", "Mīnalocanī"? The Mīnāṁbikā of Madurai is world-famous and she is one who grants boons to her devotees. She who has existed from the very beginning of Time up till now is named after her eyes. However, her name does not occur in the two devotional works that are like the two eyes among the hymns to the goddess, the *Sahasranāmam* and the *Saundaryalaharī.* We think of it as a drawback and feel disappointed because of it.

But, on careful examination of the two hymns, we will realise that there is no cause for disappointment. In both, although the name Mīnākṣī as such does not occur, it is hinted at or suggested, that is there is a "sūcanā" (indication) of it. That her name is not explicitly mentioned shows that she has a special distinction. Is not the subtle superior to the gross?

As the *Lalitā-Sahasranāmam* goes on describing Ambā, there occurs the name of ''Vaktra-lakṣmī-parīvāha-calan-mīnābhalocanā". "Vaktra-lakṣmī" means the glow of Ambā's face. It exists as a great flow —"parīvāha". If the radiance of the face becomes a stream there must be fish in it. Where do you find the fish in this ocean of tranquillity?

The elongated eyes of Ambā are indeed the fish. "Locana" means eye. ("Lokanam" means seeing. The world is called "loka" as a visible phenomenon). The eye that is like a fish is "mīnābhalocana". Though the name of "Mīnākṣī" as such is not mentioned in the *Sahasranāmam,* it is suggested by the word "Mīnābhalocanā".

Here we have found an answer to one shortcoming.

What now about the *Saundaryalaharī?* In the stanza in which Ambā's eyes are brought in relation to a number of cities, Mathurā

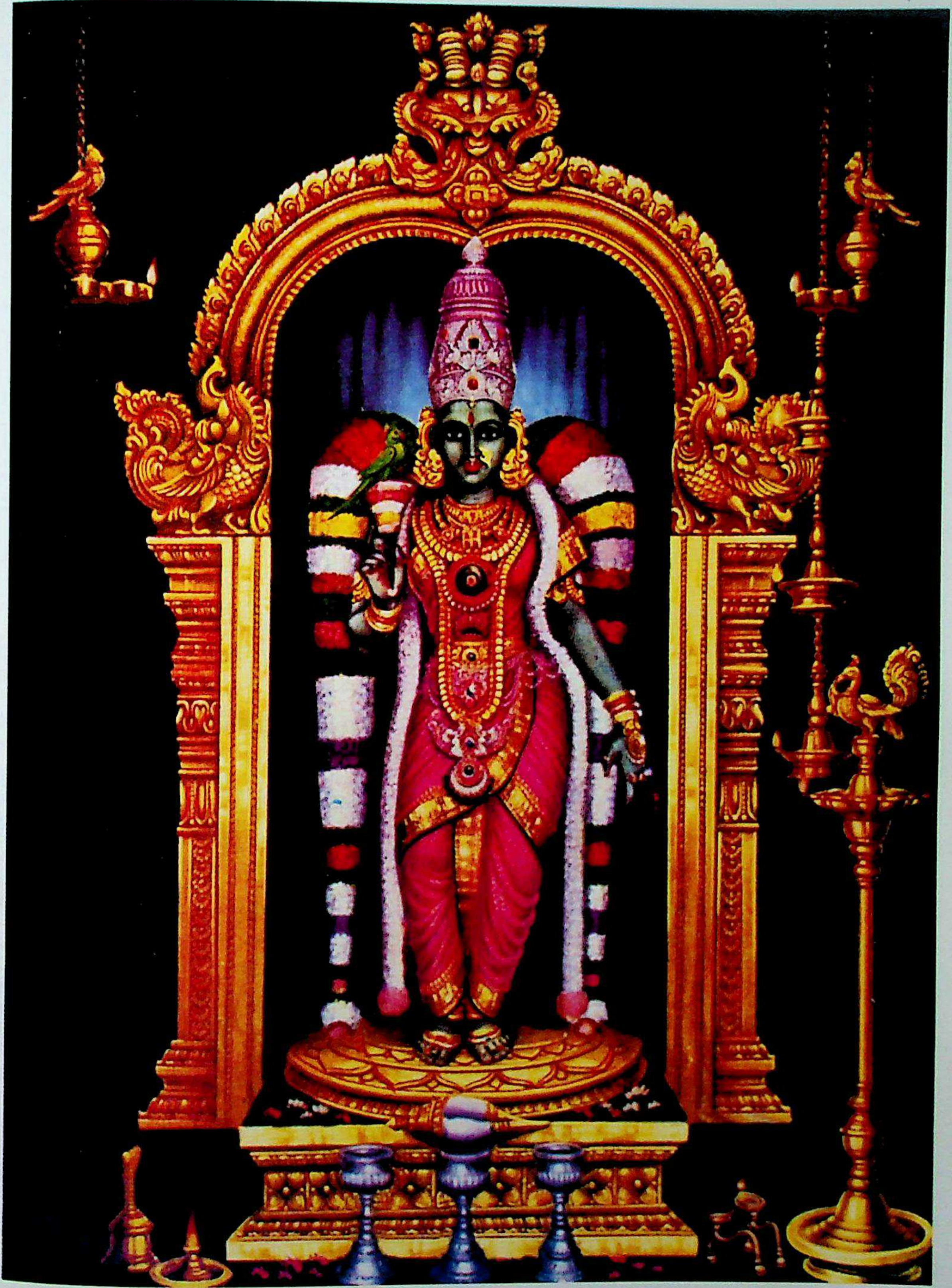
(Madhurā) is mentioned and we may take it to mean the Southern city of Madurai. So, although the name of Mīnākṣī is not mentioned, her city is. Apart from that, one of the stanzas describing Ambā's eyes has these two opening lines (Stanza 56):

Tavāparṇe karṇe japanayana-paiśunya-cakitā
Nilīyante toye niyatamanimeṣāḥ śapharikāḥ

"Aparṇe": O Ambikā with the name of Aparṇa! Ambā was born the daughter of the mountain (Parvatarājakumārī) and, wanting to marry Parameśvara, performed severe austerities. During this time the ṛṣis sustained themselves on the leaves falling (naturally) from the trees. But she, the daughter of the mountain, would not do even that and hers was a total fast. For this reason she earned the name of "Aparṇā", says Kālidāsa[1]. "Parṇam" is leaf; she who did not eat even leaves is "Aparṇā". "Tava" = your; "karṇe" = in the ear, to the ear: "japa-nayane" = eyes that seemed to speak, to mutter: "paiśunya-cakitāḥ" = afraid that tales were being told about them; "śapharikāḥ" = female fish; "animeṣāḥ" = without closing their eyes; "toye" = in the water; "nilīyante" = become immersed; "niyatam" = certainly.

Why is it that fish always keep swimming under the water and not on its surface? The Ācārya thinks of a reason for this here. The fish see Ambā's eyes stretching up to her ears. The World Mother turns her look to every nook and corner of the world and to every blade of grass and to every worm and insect. Every time she looks out of the corner of her eye, it (the eye) seems to touch the ear and whisper a secret in it—so it seems to the fish. And what is the secret? In shape the eyes resemble the fish. They are tremulous as they take in the entire world so as to bless it. The fish seem to "copy" the movement of Ambā's eyes by keeping always aswim under the water. But they are afraid of the possibility that the eyes may be complaining to Ambā about them, whispering in her ears, "The fish are competing with us." After listening to their "petition", if Parāśakti decides to take action against these lowly creatures? It is because of this fear that the fish keep swimming under the water instead of on its surface.

Just as Duryodhana, after he had suffered defeat at the hands of Bhīma, hid in a cavern in a pond, so the fish, afraid of the beauty of Ambā's eyes, go deep under the water.



Srī Mīnākṣī

"Śapharikā" means female fish. "Paiśunya" is telling tales about somebody (ratting). "Cakitā" means trembling with fear. Afraid that if they go to battle with Ambā's eyes they would suffer defeat both in the matter of their beauty and in their ability to swim about, they live incognito under the water.

There are no fish in the pond of the golden lotuses of the temple of Mīnākṣī in Madurai. The reason is that shamed by the beauty of the eyes of the goddess, the fish do not "raise their heads" [they are not seen].

By likening the eyes of Ambā to fish and by stating that the fish go into hiding shamed by the beauty of those eyes, the Ācārya brings in Mīnākṣī by suggestion in the stanza, that is by "sūcanā".

In this way what we thought to be a second drawback of the hymn is also removed.

"Animeṣāḥ" : without closing the eyes, says the hymn about the fish. ("Nimiṣa" is the time taken for the twinkling of an eye.) That Ambā does not close her eyes was mentioned in an earlier stanza and the very word "animeṣa" was used there. The world is created as she opens her eyes and it is destroyed as she closes them. She does not close her eyes for the reason that the world should not perish. In the celestial world no one closes his or her eyes. In the case of Ambā the Ācārya says that she does not close her eyes because of her desire to keep the world alive. Another reason also occurs to me. During the fraction of a second taken for the twinkling of her eye, the children of the world (Ambā's children) will be denied the ambrosia of her sidelong glance.

Why does the Ācārya say the same thing about fish? (That they do not close their eyes.) There is a belief that fish do not sleep. The fish (referred to in the stanza) go deep into the water and remain alert, the reason being they are afraid that Ambā will come to fight with them because of her eyes telling tales in her ears.

Reference

1 Svayam viśīrṇa drumaparṇavṛttitā
Parā hi kāṣṭhā tapasastayā punaḥ
Tadapyapākīrṇamataḥ priyamvadām
Vadantyaparṇeti ca tām puravidāḥ
— *Kumārasaṁbhavam,* 5.28.

Chapter 87

"Mother, Bathe Me too in Your Grace"

After the stanza in which Mīnākṣī is called to mind, there are a number of ślokas that deeply touch our hearts, and one of them (57) is a prayer to Ambikā's sidelong glance made with a heart that melts in devotion. It is a stanza in which flows the Ācārya's verbal nectar and it is composed when the nectar welling up in Ambā's sidelong glance flows fully towards him. However, instead of saying that the goddess's sidelong glance has come to him in a flow and become "collected" in him, he prays to her in utter humility for the same (for her sidelong glance). The Ācārya in fact says that he *too* must receive Ambā's glance and he does so without any trace of ego in him. As one who is the pinnacle of devotion and jñāna and poetic genius he prays thus for Ambā's grace.

Many great devotees like the Nāyanmārs[g] and the Āzhvārs[g], who had a vision of the Lord and who have had the experience of divinity, have prayed, lamenting, "Will not this *nāyana* be vouchsafed your *darshan*?" Why do they act or speak like this? We who do not come face to face with the Lord do not know to lament with intensity that we have not been granted his *darshan*. So the Lord who is resolved to wash away the sins of those who pray to him with intense devotion thinks to himself: "These people do not know how to pray with all their heart and lament with deep feeling that they have not had my *darshan*. So I must teach them how to do it." He reveals his words of grace only through those who have realised him inwardly. He inspires these great men who delight themselves in him to speak his words, words that would constitute a "model" for us to lament with devotion that we have not had his *darshan*. It is thus that Ambā has inspired the Ācārya to pray with a heart that melts in devotion for her and speak words that should be an example for us to include in our prayers.

Dṛśā drāghīyasyā daradalita-nīlotpala-rucā
Davīyāṁsam dīnam snapaya kṛpaya māmapi Śive
Anenāyam dhanyo bhavati na ca te hāniriyatā
Vane vā harmye vā samakaranipāto himakaraḥ

"Dṛśā": the opening word speaks of dṛṣṭi; we may take it to mean "with the eyes", "through the look". The reference is to Ambā's eyes, her glance.

"Drāghīyasyā" = longer than anything else; the word "drāghīyas" is in the comparative degree. The Ācārya observes that Ambā's look or glance is more wide-ranging or long-ranging than anything else. "Dṛśā drāghīyasyā" = by means of the sidelong glance that has a very extensive reach; the sidelong glance of the elongated eyes that goes a long distance. Elongated eyes are a characteristic of noble women.

A mother would like her child to be always within her sight. She would keep looking at it whether it is in the hammock, outside the house, in the backyard or anywhere else. For Ambā all creatures of the universe are her children, indeed they are all babes in arms. People who have accomplished great things, who have performed great feats, all are her infants. Just as a mother keeps her baby within her sight, Ambā keeps within her sight all her infant children including animals, birds, worms and even grass. In other words her glance extends to the borders of the universe. Where is the boundary of the universe? It seems to be endless with its galaxies, nebulae and so on, so say scientists. If this cosmos without an end is embraced by Ambā's look it means her look is also without an end in its range. It goes on and on extending endlessly and falling on all children of the Brahmāṇḍa, "drāghīyasyā".

If Ambā's glance encompasses all the world, it means it falls on all, irrespective of whether any of them deserves it or or not.

This is the distinctive quality of Ambā's sidelong glance. What is its form like, the wealth constituted by that form?

"Daradalita-nīlotpala-rucā".

By "ruci" we usually mean the taste experienced by the sense organ of the mouth (or the tongue). It does have such a meaning in

Sanskrit, but the word chiefly denotes light perceived by the sense organ of the eye. The phrase "hemāmbuja-ruci", used earlier (in Stanza 48) to denote Ambā's forehead eye, means that it (the eye in the forehead) has the radiance of a golden lotus. There it was "daradalita-hemāmbuja-ruciḥ". Here it is "daradalita-nīlotpala-ruciḥ". The third eye which glows like fire is "hemāṁbuja"; the other two eyes are "nīlotpala".

The word "nīlotpala" sounds soft and sweet because of the two "la-kāras'' in it. So too the name "Lalitā". When we make an ornament we use in it gems of different sizes and different colours, small, big, green, red, and so on. In the same way, in a literary work, the words used are chosen according to how euphonious and how meaningful they are. The mark of a great poet is to employ words that are pregnant with meaning, words that are mellifluent, words with their very sound conveying a meaning.

The chief goddess of the temple in Tiruvārūr, in Tañjāvūr district, has the name "Nilotpalāmbā". There is also an independent sanctum in it for Kamalāmbā. "Kamala", as you know, is the lotus.

"Nīlotpala" is *karuṅguvalai* in Tamiḷ. "Utpala" by itself means the *kuvalai* flower, water-lily. With the prefix "nīla" it means "*karuṇguvalai*" blue or black water-lily. In Sanskrit "nīla" usually means blue; "kṛṣṇa" means black or dark. But "nīla" itself can mean black. But here, in this stanza, the word denotes blue itself, not what is denoted by the prefix "*karum*" in the Tamiḷ word *(karuṇguvalai)* which means black.

If the red lotus has the beauty of warm, bright, light, the nīlotpala has the beauty of a cool glow: it is indeed cool to the eye. The nīlotpala sways in the wind in the lake and it is made very cool by the droplets of water on its petals. Ambā's two eyes which are moist with compassion are like the wet nilotpalas, very pleasingly cool. As Ambā casts her sidelong glance across the world, it sways from one corner of the world to another. In shape each eye is like a nīlotpala, the look also is blue. Apart from being long they are also blue. Besides, having the same coolness as nīlotpala, they too sway from side to side. There are so many similarities between the two. "Rucā"= by the glow. This glow does not dazzle our eyes and is not like that of hemāṁbuja which refers to the third eye. It is cool blue light that is like a salve to the eye that is dazzled.

The Ācārya prays to the glance of Ambā's left and right eyes which are like blue water-lilies, not to that of the eye in the forehead which is metaphorically hemāṁbuja or a golden lotus. Is not the great heat caused by Īśvara by opening his forehead eye known to all? Though Ambā too has a similar eye, there is no account of her having ever opened it.

The Ācārya uses the word "nīlotpala" with an adjective, "daradalita". "Dalita" here means blossomed, unfolded. When the moon's rays fall upon the blue water-lily bud it bursts open; it becomes "dalita". With the prefix "dara" it means "little by little". "Daradalita"= blossomed little by little.

A blue water-lily that is in full bloom will not be shaped like the eye. It is only when it is a bud that it will be so shaped, though not fully in the bud form. When the eye is closed, only then will it look like a blue water-lily bud. That Ambā never closes her eyes has been stated so often. Where is the question of her closing her eyes when she always keeps blessing the world with her sidelong glance?

Can we then say that she sees with her eyes fully open. No, no. That also cannot be right. Looking with the eyes fully open cannot reflect compassion wholly: it is in anger that the eyes are fully open. In compassion the eyes must be partly closed, partly open, and the pupil of the eye too must be partly seen and partly not seen. In śānta or tranquillity, the eyes will be drawn in and only a little bit will be seen. In compassion, the eyes will be half closed and half open. When Ambā looks at the world in supreme compassion, her eyes, like the blue water-lily, will be a little open and a little closed: it is this that the Ācārya describes as "daradalita-nīlotpala-rucā". In this state a flower's subtle beauty is seen at its best. It is a tantalising phenomenon. The flower seems to tell us: "There is something hidden inside. It will not be revealed but, at the same time, it will not remain totally unrevealed. By revealing half the 'something' I will excite your eagerness to know the rest." It is similar in poetry. The poet always leaves a little unsaid in his poem so as to enhance its aesthetic appeal.

As you go further and further into the inner part of the blue water-lily you will find that the petals become less and less blue in colour. The same is the case with the red lotus. If you go on examining its petals, you will find that, after you come to about half of the flower, the petals will become whiter and whiter. At the root you will see that there is no redness at all. Only when it is partly unfolded will a blue water-lily be seen to be completely blue, with the sheen of silk and looking as if it has been oiled. When it is in full bloom the whiteness of the inner petals will show. As for Ambā's eyes they are entirely blue. They will never lose their colour and become white. The qualifying word "dara" added to "dalita" is appropriate: with that word "dalita" means a "little unfolded".

"Rucā" = because of the glow or radiance.

The first line means: "Your glance with its extensive reach and with its glow of a blue water-lily just unfolding..."

When we speak of "dīrgha-darśanam" we refer to one's ability to see far into the past and into the future. Here the far-sightedness is with reference to space; Ambā's glance can go far and traverse the entire universe.

The next line: "Davīyāṁsam dīnam snapaya kṛpayā māmapi Śive."

The first line is replete with "da-kāras": "dṛśā", "drāghīyāsyā", "dara" and "dalita". The second line too has two "da-kāras": "davīyāṁsam" and "dīnam". "Drāghīyasyā" and "davīyāṁsam" ring alike. All this is part of verbal ornamentation, "śabdālankāra". But more noteworthy, indeed a thousand times more important, is the meaning conveyed by the words [arthālankāra], the "bhāva", the feeling evoked.

The Ācārya addresses Ambā as "Śive", the embodiment of all that is auspicious.

"Davīyāṁsam" means existing very far away. Like "drāghīyasyā", this word is also in the comparative degree. If Ambā's look is longer (reaches out farther) than anything else, what about the one who is more distant from her than all others? Who is it?

"Dīnam": one who is in abject proverty, one who suffers much and is worthy of everyone's sympathy, one who is full of fear, good-for-nothing, lowly—the word has all these meanings. The Ācārya has used such a word here.

He prays for "this dīna, this poor man", who is fartherst from Ambā, farther than anyone else. "Kṛpayā"= with your compassion; "snapaya" = bathe (him). "Bathe this poor man who is full of dirt and make him pure, Mother," so prays the Ācārya.

Where is he to be bathed? In a river or a pond? And how? In warm water or cold? Not in any of these. Then in what? "Dṛśā"—in Ambā's glance. "In the ambrosia of your sidelong glance, bathe him, Mother." A drop of that ambrosia of her sidelong glance will not be enough. The ambrosia must come flooding and bathe him, this dīna.

If we examined the meaning of the first line of the stanza we would think that there is no need for such a prayer. "Drāghīyasyā": does not Ambā's sidelong glance reach out far without being asked by anyone to be so and does it not fall on all irrespective of whether or not they deserve it? And are not all creatures of the world bathed in it? Then why should the Ācārya specially pray, "Snapaya kṛpayā": "Bathe (him) in your compassion?"

Why should the Ācārya pray thus? This dīna is not like other creatures. He is far removed from them. Is he not "davīyāṁsa" (one who is far away)? He does not seem to belong even to this world in which people who have committed great wrongs are enabled to receive Ambā's sidelong glance. It appears he has been banished from this world.

If he has been banished (or excommunicated) even by the supremely compassionate Ambā, it means that he must be so evil, so full of sin. But who is he?

Now comes the word that is the very soul of this stanza, the word that eloquently expresses the sublime character of the Ācārya's compassionate heart and his humility.

"Māmapi".

"Mām api" : "Mām" = me; "api" = also; "me also".

The one who is removed furthest from Ambā, the dīna (the wretched and the impure and the suffering one) is not an unknown person. "It is I myself," says the Ācārya.

Just as Ambā and Īśvara are not separate from each other so is our Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda not separate from the two. If we just think of him all our sins will be washed away at once. He is the one who lifted up the fallen, sanctified the fallen, the one who encouraged and enthused us all who are dīna and hīna (lowly and abandoned) by the teaching that proclaims to us the non-dualistic truth, "You too, child, are the Paramātman." It is such a one who, after banishing himself far from Ambā, beseeches her: "Davīyāṁsam dīnam snapaya kṛpayā māmapi, Śive" : "Bathe me too, O Mother, in the holy water of your sidelong glance, me who is poor and lowly and inaccessibly far from you."

Not "bathe me" but "bathe me *too*" ("māmapi snapaya"). The Ācārya has abased himself lower than others, made himself smaller than others. "Cast your sidelong glance on me too." It means the Ācārya is telling Ambā: "You are the embodiment of compassion and your sidelong glance reaches out to great distances. Yet you have banished me to a spot which is beyond the scope of your glance. Is it not because I do not deserve it at all, even one like me?" Ambā's glance has a long reach—"drāghīyas"—and if she wills it she can extend it further. There is nothing that is beyond her. The Ācārya prays in abject humility: "Instead of your glance lingering over me too fleetingly, may it fall on me as a rain of grace. May I be bathed in it."

The Ācārya was an incarnation of Śiva-Śakti and in that he was something above a king or a lord, a universal teacher, Jagadācārya. He remained always on a lofty plane in his experience of the Reality and what he accomplished in his life of 32 years was such as no other man could have accomplished and it arouses our wonder even today. In that brief life he was engaged not only in the uplift of the world but in showering his compassion on all including the Kāpālika who wanted to chop off his head. Why does the Ācārya, so noble and high-minded, speak thus lowering himself?

As I said in another context, the Ācārya speaks words addressed to Ambā, words that *we* ought to speak ourselves. It is indeed we who have committed great sins and are banished far beyond the empire of bliss, Ambā's sidelong glance. So it is we who must pray as the Ācārya does. But we do not know how to pray. So the Ācārya teaches us to pray, the Ācārya who does not need to pray in this manner.

They say that Jesus took upon himself the sins of all people and was nailed on the cross. The Ācārya takes upon himself all the evil that is ours and tells Ambā: "Bathe me too in the stream of your sidelong glance." He gives us the medicine to cure us of our sins, the nectar of Ambā's sidelong glance. If we pray to Ambā for her sidelong glance, as taught by the Ācārya, she will grant it to us. She cannot but do so. For, after all, it was she who inspired the Ācārya to speak thus.

Earlier, we saw that when the Ācārya dealt with the nine rasas revealed in Ambā's eyes, he spoke for all, for "naḥ" (for "us"), but when he came to the karuṇā rasa or compassion he used the word "mayi" (in "me"). We did not then understand why he did so. The answer is clearly indicated in this stanza. Actually, the compassionate sidelong glance falls on all; its impact is universal. So there is no need for anyone to pray for it specially. The Ācārya says in utter humility that he has been banished as a dīna, as a good-for-nothing person, and that he has to ask for the Mother's compassion. It is for the same reason that he uses the word "mayi" in the earlier stanza also.

In the tradition of Śrīkṛṣṇa Caitanya—in fact in all schools subscribing to dualism—the naicya bhāva, in which the devotee adores the Lord abasing himself, is very much extolled. The Bhagavatpāda proclaimed the non-dualistic truth that the individual Self is one with the Brahman. But when he becomes a devotee he surpasses all others in his naicya bhāva. "I am far removed from all others [lower than the lowest]. Bathe me, Mother, in your sidelong glance," he pleads.

What would be the Ācārya's answer if Ambā were to ask him, "That is all right. You have yourself said that I keep blessing the world on my own with my sidelong glance. Even so you say that I have discarded you, banished you far, because you do not deserve my sidelong glance in the least. Then why do you pray for it?" Such a question on Ambā's part would only be a pretext to invite an ingenious reply of poetic beauty from the Ācārya.

And this reply is contained in the second half of the stanza:

Anenāyam dhanyo bhavati na ca te hāniriyatā
Vane vā harmye vā samakaranipāto himakaraḥ

"I do not deserve it, your glance, and I must not ask for it, and it is in conformity with the laws of ethics or morality. But where is the law or rule for love, for devotion, that is unalloyed? There are objects that do good to all, without consideration of merit or justice. Does not the Gītā teach samadarśana, the concept of seeing the selfsame thing in everything and everybody, and describe it as the characteristic of jñānins? There are so many who have samadarśana. I will give a specific example: Himakaraḥ." The Ācārya invariably uses the word "himakaraḥ" for the moon whenever he speaks of Ambā because he showers coolness. This himakara does not think about where his light serene should fall or where it should not, whether anyone deserves it or does not. Without the least discrimination, the moon pours out his light equally on the Tañjāvūr gopuram as he does on the sculptures of Māmallapuram; he pours it out as much on the slums as on the burning grounds. "Vane vā harmye va", whether it is the forest or the terrace of a palace he pours out his rays without making any distinction between the two. "Samakaranipātaḥ": he rains his rays equally on all. Does the moon emit his light in extra measure on the smooth and shiny marble terrace of the emperor's palace, the terrace specially built to receive moonlight? Or does he reduce his flow of light when it falls in the forest where brush and thorny shrubs grow? "Your sidelong glance," states the Ācārya to Ambā, "must have the same character as the moon. So, though I am totally undeserving of it, could you not bathe me in the sacred water of your sidelong glance just as the moon drenches even a cactus with his rays?"

Ambā's question of how the Ācārya can pray for her kaṭākṣa without deserving it has been answered. The answer is: "You should not mind whether one merits it or not and you must act with samadṛṣṭi (samadarśana) on all."

There is another interesting question which we could presume Ambā would have put to the Ācārya: "By looking at a sinner, my sidelong glance will itself be tainted. What will I do then? When the glance falls on people who are not all right, what harm will come to it? Will it be like eye trouble that is contagious?"

The Ācārya's reply: "Na ca te hāniriyatā". "Na ca te hanīḥ iyatā". "Iyatā" = because of it; "te" = to you; with "vā" it means "even to you"; "hāniḥ na" = (there will be) no harm.

"By looking at a great sinner like me you will come to no harm. You do not stand to lose anything and you will not be affected by what is seen by you, by the object seen by you. Is the subject not affected by the object? The example of the moon could be enough. If moonlight falls in the forest, is the moon pricked by the thorny shrubs in it? Do the stones there cause the moon any injury? No. When moonlight fell on the bed that is the haṁsa-swing on the terrace, did the moon feel anything soft to his touch or did he experience any pleasure? If moonlight is not affected by any object whatever its nature, why should any object, because it does not deserve your kaṭākṣa, affect that glance of yours, affect the compassionate glance of Candramaulīśvarī, that is you? Let me continue to be full of evil. How will that affect your sidelong glance?'' "Na ca te hāniriyatā": "no harm will come to you too."

Why this "to you too"? If there is a "to you too" there must, for the purposes of symmetry, a "for me too". What is that?

"Anena ayam dhanyo bhavati."

"By being bathed in the grace of your glance I too have become enriched, become blessed. That is, I have made a great gain, obtained riches," observes the Ācārya.

I have changed the order in which the Ācārya makes this statement. What he says first is: "I have become blessed, become enriched by Ambā's sidelong glance." It is afterwards that he observes: "You will not come to any harm by it [by your sidelong glance falling on me]."

"Anena" = by this (that is as mentioned in the first two lines, of being bathed in the sidelong glance); "ayam" = he (instead of "I", "he" is used; this is in keeping with the tradition of sannyāsins who do not refer to themselves in the first person); "dhanyaḥ" = wealthy (one who has dhana, wealth, is "dhanya"). With Ambā's sidelong glance one obtains the wealth of her grace and there is no greater wealth than it: "bhavati' = becomes (that is "I become)".

"By becoming the object of your sidelong glance I have been enriched. So you must cast on me too your sidelong glance, far though I am from you."

"All sin, all evil, vanishes in your compassionate sidelong glance. One finds fulfilment of one's life and obtains an entire ocean of bliss. Besides, there is no harm done to you, Ambā. While you do not stand to lose, I make a big gain. That lack of merit for which you kept me away from you is no longer there in me. I have obtained merit in plenty because of your sidelong glance. I, who had nothing, now possess everything. I have become rich."

It is because the Ācārya wants all of us to be rewarded with this wealth (the wealth of Ambā's grace) that he has blessed us with this śloka. If it is recited with all one's heart, Ambā will bless us however undeserving we be. Her sidelong glance, which is cool like moonlight and the blue water-lily, will elevate us.

We make ourselves happy by adorning ourselves in many ways. We go not only after outward adornment. Learning, status, wealth, fame: we seek all these and they too are adornments. But there is no ornament higher than that of deserving Ambā's grace. If her sidelong glance falls on us we will realise that there is no jewellery, no decoration, superior to it. It is an ornament that will bring us the realisation that all else is no ornament at all.

The Ācārya concludes the stanza with a prayer to Ambā to see everything as one and the same, "samakara-nipāto himakaraḥ". This samadarśana is seeing everything as one (all as equal) or the Advaita concept that everything is the one Brahman. Mūka in his adoration of Ambā says that this attitude is a boon we receive from Ambā's kaṭākṣa (*Aryā Śatakam,* 48: Part 1 of Mūka's *Pañcaśatī)*[1]. It looks as if he had this stanza (47, *Saundaryalaharī)* in mind since he also speaks of the palace and the forest. While the Ācārya uses the word "vanam", Mūka has in its place "vipinam": the former has "harmyam" while the latter has "bhavanam". One who has obtained Ambā's sidelong glance, says Mūka, will look upon both (the forest and the mansion) as the same. Man is tormented by desire, anger and fear. The forest stands for fear and it is banished by Ambā's kaṭākṣa. The forest becomes the home for one who is blessed with that glance. Then friend and foe are alike to him.

Which means he will no longer nurse any anger against his enemy. Then he too will not be tormented by desire and to him *ottanjali* [a small piece of broken tile] and a young woman's lips will be the same. Bathing in Ambā's sidelong glance rids him of all the three impurities (desire, fear and anger) and imparts him the non-dualistic attitude of oneness with all. The Ācārya too refers to the "dhanya", the man who has obtained non-dualistic wealth.

We must think over these ideas and recite this stanza again and again and pray to Ambā.

[The Great Master recites the stanza word by word, steeped as he is in its ideas].

Dṛśā drāghīyasyā daradalita-nīlotpala-rucā
Davīyāṁsam dīnam snapaya kṛpayā māmapi Śive
Anenāyam dhanyo bhavati na ca te hāniriyatā
Vane va harmye va samakara-nipāto himakaraḥ

Reference

1 Śiva Śiva paśyanti sama Śrikāmākṣī kaṭākṣitāḥ puruṣāḥ
Vipinam bhavanamamitram mitram loṣṭam ca yuvati bimboṣṭham
—*Mūka-Pañcaśati*, Āryā Śatakam, 48.

Chapter 88

The Nose-Ornament and the Finer Points of Yoga

In the course of his keśādipāda[g] description of Ambā, the Ācārya devotes a number of stanzas to her eyes and now (in Stanza 61) he speaks of her nose. In this he briefly touches upon some finer points of the science of yoga.

Ambā's smooth nose, with its nostrils, looks like a stem of bamboo with its naturally formed holes and is adorned by a pearl stud and a pendant. "Muktāmaṇidhara": the Ācārya specifically refers to the pearl stud. In Madurai and Kanyākumārī the diamond nose-studs are special to the deities. The *Sahasranāmam* has this name of Ambā: "Tārākānti-tiraskāri-nāsābharaṇa-bhāsurā" : It means that the goddess excels the stars in lustre because of the radiance of her nose ornament. From the fact that the stars twinkle, giving the appearance of having many colours, the inference is that the nose ornament referred to is made of diamonds. Pearls do not shine with many colours. But, customarily, a nose-stud is called "*muttu-mūkkutti*" [nose - stud of pearls] even if it is made of precious stones. It is believed that the pearl nose-stud is particularly auspicious. We know that it was very much in fashion once upon a time.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa Paramātman is a perfect embodiment of male and female beauty combined. So he wore a nose-pendant. The verse everybody knows and which begins with the phrase, "Kastūrī-tilakam" contains these words: "nāsāgre nava-mauktikam": it means Kṛṣṇa wears a new pearl as a nose-ornament.

That the Ācārya speaks of a pearl ornament for Ambā's nose enhances the appropriateness of the comparison he has made of it with the bamboo stem. It is believed that pearls are found in a bamboo belonging to a high strain. Apart from oysters and bamboo, the elephant's forehead and sugarcane also, it is said, sometimes contain pearls. In the

Saundaryalaharī (Stanza 74) it is said that Parameśvara, after slaying Gajāsura, split open his forehead and made a necklace for Ambā with the pearls found in it. Basing himself on the traditional belief that bamboo yields pearls, the Ācārya says in the present stanza that it is appropriate that Ambā's nose which is smooth like a stem of bamboo should have a pearl stud.

In the case of the bamboo, the pearl is inside it, but in the case of Ambā the pearl stud (or pendant) is on the outside of her nose. This detracts from the appropriateness of the simile. Not so, argues the Ācārya. Through the stem of the bamboo that is Ambā's nose comes her divine breath. Ordinarily, if breath is exhaled through the hole in a bamboo, music is produced, the music of the flute. What happens here, when Ambā breathes? Her breath sweeps down the pearl which lodges itself outside of her nose as an ornament for it.

The Vedas are the breath of the Supreme Being (the Supreme Goddess). It is said as word play, or as a near pun, that "mukta" is pearl and "mukti" is liberation. The idea expressed here is that from the breath constituted by the Vedas emerged the mukta that leads to mukti or liberation.

There is another example of verbal play, in fact a pun, in the stanza. "Vaṁśam" means bamboo. There is a hymn in which we adore Veṇugopāla, Kṛṣṇa, as "Vamśī-vibhuṣita . . ." "Vaṁśam" also means lineage. The Ācārya who begins by saying that Ambā's nose resembles a stem of bamboo calls her "the flag of fame of the lineage of the mountain of snow" : "asau nāsāvaṁśastuhinagirivaṁśa-dhvajapaṭi".

Let me speak about the yogic implications of the stanza. When the Ācārya says that the pearl inside Amba's nose is brought out by her breath, he mentions that it is the breath exhaled through the left nostril. However, there is no word used to indicate "left". The Ācārya says: "Śiśirakara-niśvāsa-galitam". "Niśvāsa" is the breath exhaled; the breath inhaled is "ucchvāsa". "Galitam" is used to denote that something is expelled. "Śiśira-kara": what does the word mean? Nowhere is it mentioned that it means "left". "Śiśira" means cold (snow): "hima" also means the same. So "śiśira-kara" means the same as "himakara" which is the Ācārya's favourite word for the moon with reference to Ambā. He explains that it is because of the "exhalation of the moon" that the pearl is expelled. What kind of riddle is it?

The science of yoga is indeed a riddle. According to it, when the mind is subject to the pulls of desire, anger and other urges or emotions, the breath goes in through the left nostril, and goes out through the right. But when the mind is tranquil and absorbed in noble thoughts it is the reverse: the inhalation is through the right nostril and the exhalation through the left. When there is no consciousness or when we transcend the mind and are in a state of samādhi[g] there will be no breathing: the breath will be retained in the state of kuṁbhaka. Then there is nothing to do, no activity. Ambā is the Kāryabrahman, the Brahman of action. She is all the time steeped in the exalted thoughts of compassion. So she inhales through the right nostril and exhales through the left.

"Let that be. The question is why does the Ācārya speak of 'śiśirakara-niśvāsam'?"

This subject is part of the science of yoga. The nāḍi on the right side through which the breath passes is called Piṅgalā or Sūryanāḍi (Sun-nāḍi); and the nāḍi on the left through which the breath passes is Iḍā or Candranāḍi (Moon-nāḍi). The middle nāḍi is Suṣumnā, Agnināḍi (Fire-nāḍi). The jīvātman (the individual Self) is indeed the Paramātman: the Paramātman's left eye is the moon, right eye the sun and the middle eye fire. The left-hand breathing tube being named after the moon, the Ācārya calls it "śiśirakara". All this has been dealt with in the "Ānandalaharī" section of the hymn and this section being devoted to a description of Ambā's beauty the Ācārya does not elaborate on it (the science of yoga). Even so, without dealing with the subject at length, he expresses the whole idea in one word in a way that would delight people of learning.

Chapter 89

The Incomparable Beauty of Ambā's Lips

In the head-to-foot portrayal of Ambā, after her nose comes her mouth. The Ācārya first describes the lips of the goddess (Stanza 62). Usually cherry lips are compared to corals. But the redness of coral is no redness at all compared to Ambā's lips. Here the Ācārya has composed his verse incorporating an idea based on the general belief that coral is a creeper. Creepers are generally green in colour and the fruit ripening on them are usually red. If the creeper itself were to be red how red should be its fruit? Could that then be likened to Ambā's lips? No, that also is not possible. The reason is there is nothing called a coral fruit, says the Ācārya, as if worried. We do speak of *"pavalakkoḍi"*[1] (coral creeper) and one of Arjuna's wives is indeed called by that name. Actually, coral is the bone of an aquatic creature belonging to the octopus [polyp] family. How can it bear fruit? Lips are likened to the bimba[2] fruit also. Biṁba also means "pratibimba" (reflected image). That is how the bimba fruit got its name. Ambā's lips indeed are the original biṁba. Once, playfully, she made the image of her red lips fall on the shiny rind of the bimba fruit and made it red: that is how it also got the name of bimba. However, it does not have redness to the same degree as the lips of the goddess. It tried to become red like her lips.

The Ācārya uses the word "adhyāroḍhum" here which means exerting oneself more than one's strength permits. Then the bimba fruit realised that it was madness to try and acquire the same redness as Ambā's lips, that it was indeed impossible. In shame it gave up its effort. "Kathamiva na vilajjeta?" asks the Ācārya. "How can it not be ashamed of itself?'' Redness is imparted by shyness also [the cheeks become flushed]. We hear that so and so "blushed in shyness". Thus feeling a sense of shame, feeling shy about its attempt to become more red, the biṁba fruit did indeed acquire an extra shade of red, but even so the colour could not match the redness of Ambā's lips. To compare the original redness of Ambā's lips with the redness of the biṁba fruit (which is but their reflection) is as absurd as saying that the mother resembles her child.

The lips of Ambā are incomparable in their beauty.

Notes

[1] *Pavalakkoḍi* is a Tamiḷ word.

[2] Bimba = *Coccinia Indica.*

Chapter 90

The Smile that "Sours" Moonlight

After speaking about Ambā's lips, the Ācārya goes on to describe the beauty of her smile and the stanza in which he does so (63) itself brims with poetic beauty.

Smitajyotsnājālam tava vadanacandrasya pibatām
Cakorāṇām āsīdatirasatayā cañcu-jaḍimā
Ataste śitāmśoḥ amṛtalaharīm āmlarucayaḥ
Pibanti svacchandam niśi niśi bhṛśam kāñjikadhiyā

As he begins to describe the beauty of Ambā [Śloka 42], the Ācārya refers to her as "Candramaulīśvarī." In that stanza the reference is to the moon set on the crown adorning Ambā's head. Here the face itself is the moon: "tava vadanacandra", "your mukhamati" or "your matimukham" ["mukha" is face; "mati" is the moon]. "Mukha" denotes both the face and the mouth; "vadana" also can be taken to mean both, the face and the mouth. "Vad" is the root of the word which means to speak. In "Satyam vada"[1], "vada" means speak. So we could say that the primary meaning of "vadana" is the mouth. In the descending order of description of Ambā [keśādipāda], after the nose comes the mouth. After describing the nose, the lips, and that which is covered by the lips, the mouth — "vadana." However, "vadana" here means the face.

From the face that is the moon emanates moonlight. On the face of the real moon there is a dark spot but on Ambā's face there are the two rows of bright, white, teeth. Their glitter is revealed as she smiles. Poets say that a woman's glance is like black bees darting and that her smile or laughter is like a bubbling stream of white. The Ācārya speaks similarly of Ambā's smile: "Smita-jyotsnājālam tava vadanacandrasya." "Tava vadanacandrasya": of your face of the moon; "smita" = the smile that is; "jyotsnā" = moonlight; "jālam" = spread. "The moonlight of your face of the moon that spreads in the form of your smile. That moonlight...."

What was done to the moonlight. And by whom?

There is a bird called "cakora". It is believed to sustain itself on moonlight. The moon exudes nectar; that nectar is its rays. That the cakora sustains itself on moonlight is part of the poetic tradition. It seems these birds imbibe the moonlight that is Ambā's smile: "Pibatām cakorāṇām" = of the cakora birds that are imbibing...

What happened to the birds?

"*Atirasatayā cañcu jaḍimā āsīt.*"

What is this "*atirasam*"? We speak [in the South] of *vaḍai*, *pāyasam*, *atirasam*. Is it this "*atirasam*" that is referred to?

No, "atirasa" means excessive rasa. The Ācārya refers to Ambā's smile that is moonlight being excessively sweet. By taking in this moonlight that is excessively sweet, the beaks of the cakoras were benumbed. Birds take their food with their beaks, is that not so? After taking in Ambā's smile that is moonlight, the beaks of the cakoras became insensitive. "Atirasatayā" = because of excessive sweetness; "cakorāṇām" = of the cakoras; "cañcu" = beak(s); "jaḍimā āsīt" = were benumbed.

What would the birds do now? How would they make their benumbed beaks normal again and regain their sense of taste? Having tasted the gentle smile of Jñānāṁbikā (the goddess of jñāna) they became wise and intelligent and found a way to deal with their problem.

Can we keep eating sweet rice all the time? If we have too much of it, we will find it cloying and lose our appetite. We will then feel we must have something different to eat so as to regain our appetite for sweets. That is the reason why we make both sweet and savoury items of food. But sour or acid food is a better remedy than salt for a benumbed mouth or tongue. This fact was known to the cakora birds. That is why, after their beaks had been benumbed by taking in the sweetest of delicacies known to the world, that is the nectar of the gentle smile of Ambā, they went in search of sourish gruel. Even when our tongue loses its sense of taste because of fever or some other illness we yearn for sour food. "I don't want gruel with milk. I want my gruel with buttermilk, " so we tell our relatives. The leaf of a lime tree, or its smell, we find particularly pleasing then. It is thus that the cakoras went in search of sour gruel.

"Ataḥ" = so, because their beaks had become insensitive; "te" = they, the cakora birds; "āmlarucayaḥ" = for the sake of tasting sour items...

What did they do?

The moon was raining his nectarine rays. "Śītāmśoḥ amṛtalaharīm": "śitāmśoḥ": of the moon whose rays are cool; "amṛta-laharīm" = nectarine flow, that is moonlight.

Ambā had given the cakora birds the ability to take in moonlight for their sustenance. One wonders whether it was to show how the moonlight of her smile excelled the (real) moonlight. The cakoras tasted the nectarine rays of the moon. What happened then? We think that there is nothing more delectable than amṛta, or nectar. However it be, the birds got what they had wanted : moonlight which is amṛta tasted to them like sour gruel.. "At last we have found a remedy for our benumbed beaks," they said to themselves. ''After having found the moonlight of Ambā's smile cloying because of having too much of it we have found a remedy for our benumbed beaks. This remedy is the sour gruel that is the light of the moon shining in the sky." Happy thus that they had found a solution for their problem, the birds partook of moonlight every night. "Śītāmśoḥ amṛtalaharīm": the flood of nectar that the rays of the moon are; "kāñjikadhiyā"= knowing it to be sour gruel; "niśi niśi" = every night; "svacchandam" = to their hearts' content; "bhṛśam" = plentiful; "pibanti" = drink, imbibe.

"Knowing it to be gruel": the Ācārya expresses the same with the words, "kāñjikadhiyā." The Ācārya's incarnation took place in the Malayāḷam land where *kañji* is popular. "Malayāḷam *kañji*" is a term well known [in areas outside Keraḷa].

The Ācārya has gifted us beautiful poetry in which he says that even the nectar that is moonlight is sour by comparison with the sweetness of Ambā's gentle smile: and this idea he conveys by speaking about the experience of the cakora birds. These birds are customarily given a high place since they imbibe the nectar of moonlight. The Ācārya has the distinction of using his poetic imagination to turn customary ideas into novel images. He seems to speak about it thus : "There is no need to speak in praise of cakoras as the only birds that are sustained on amṛta. They have a distinction greater than this. They take in nourishment that by comparison makes the amṛta no better than sour gruel, that nourishment being the great amṛta of the gentle smile of the Supreme Goddess. It is for a change that they take in a third-rate or fourth-rate food, that is the nectar of moonlight." The Ācārya thus puts forward a novel idea.

The celestials, in spite of partaking of amṛta, perish during the great dissolution (mahāsaṁhāra). But Īśvara remains. This was stated in the first part; the reason for the same was also mentioned. Ambā who is the embodiment of the ambrosia of consciousness, caitanyāmṛta, is superior to the gross ambrosia gotten from the churning of the ocean of milk. It is because Īśvara is always with Ambā that he never perishes. We see here that the amṛta of the gentle smile of the moon that is Ambā's face is far more delectable than the amṛta of the actual moon arising from the ocean of milk. Ambā is caitanyāmṛta, the ambrosia of consciousness, and she is also at once saundaryāmṛta, the ambrosia of beauty— and it is the same that has become her face and the gentle smile revealed by it. Earlier the Ācārya spoke of "vadana-saundaryalaharī" (the flow of beauty of the face). Here he speaks of "vadanacandra" (the face that is the moon) and states that the "amṛtalaharī" (the nectarine flow) of the moon has been turned sour by it (that is by the vadanacandra). We perceive moonlight with our eyes. So it would have been enough if the Ācārya had said that Ambā's smile is more beautiful than it (*i.e.* moonlight). But he brings in the cakora birds and makes moonlight a "commodity", the smile of Ambā being sweeter than it. Taking these ideas together we find that the caitanyalaharī has become the saundaryalaharī which is not only "palatable" to the eyes [very pleasing] but also extremely sweet to the tongue. In essence this consciousness, this beauty, this sweetness, are Ambā's supreme love. All of us must become little cakora birds and partake of that divine elixir of love, that moonlight of love.

Although we cannot take in moonlight as do the cakoras, we have moonlight dinners during full moon nights. Then the moonlight fills the atmosphere and makes it cool and pleasant. "Himakara" (one who makes things cold or cool) is also "hitakara" (one who does what is beneficial for us). The full moon gives delight to all, happiness and pleasure. Ajñāna or nescience is darkness and jñāna is light. We speak of jñāna-sūrya (the sun that dispels darkness and nescience). But the heat of the sun is not pleasant. As for the moon, not only does he dispel darkness, he is also hita, does us good. In the same way, Jñānāmbikā, the goddess of jñāna, remains hita and frees us from nescience. According to the "Puruṣasūkta", the moon is born of the mind of the Paramātman. How cool and beneficent that mind should be. Ambā who is so benign is connected with the moon in many ways. She herself dwells in the maṇḍala of the moon, the lunar circle. The *Sahasranāmam* has this name: "Candra-maṇḍala-madhyagā." Her tithi (lunar day) is Pūrṇimā, the full moon. It is on this day that special pūjā is performed to her. She wears the crescent moon on her head. Inside the head of the yogin she herself becomes the full moon raining nectar. For ignorant people like us too the Ācārya has given her gentle smile in the form of her moonlight. Let us become little cakoras, think of her gentle smile again and again and take in the ambrosia of her compassion flowing from it.

Reference

[1] Vedamanucyācaryo'ntevasinam anusāsti,
Satyam vada. Dharmam cara .....
—*Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 1.11.1.

Chapter 91

Tāṁbūla Prasāda

It is one’s white teeth that make one’s smile bright. After mentioning this idea, the Ācārya adds that the white-complexioned Sarasvatī [who is seated on the tip of Ambā’s tongue] turns red in the redness of Ambā’s tongue (Stanza 64). This matter I have dealt with earlier. The next ṣtanza refers to the remains of the tāṁbūla[1] taken by Ambā which are both red and white. The tongue, the teeth, and the lips are used in chewing tāṁbūla.

“All right. Tāṁbūla makes the mouth red. Where does the white come in?”

The Ācārya observes (stanza 65) that the white flakes of the camphor (in the tāṁbūla) looks like the moon pulverised: “śaśi-viśada-karpūraśakalā.” The Ācārya himself says so, that is why I too spoke about the white in the tāṁbūla remains.[2] “How is it that I have spoken only of the white Sarasvatī dwelling on the tip of Ambā’s tongue becoming red? While writing commentaries and composing hymns, I keep chanting the name of Śāradā [Sarasvatī] and adoring her. So to elevate her further I must speak of the redness of the betels (after chewing) on the tip of Ambā’s tongue getting mixed with the whiteness of Sarasvatī,” so the Ācārya must have thought to himself.

A “mouth full of betels” is one of the characteristics of a sumaṅgalī. In the *Sahasranāmam*, the goddess is called “Tāṁbūla-pūrita-mukhī.” This is how we must visualise Ambā with our mind’s eye.

There is no prasāda[g] superior to the remains of the betels chewed by Ambā. What have come into contact with the mouth [*eccil* in Tamiḷ], spittle and so on, cause disgust only in the case of us mortals who are constituted of flesh and blood. Ambā is the embodiment of the letters of the alphabet “*a*” to ‘‘*kṣa*”. She is also mantra personified. Above all, she is the embodiment of love and is indeed made of love and made for love. So the remnants of the betels chewed by her are to be treated as a sacred substance.

Who receives the remnants of the betels? Not some great devotee of this world, some seer or poet, according to the Ācārya. He creates a scene showing the prasāda being received by Ambā's beloved son Kumārasvāmī (Subrahmaṇya), Indra who had received instruction in Brahmavidyā[3] from her and Mahāviṣṇu, who is to be identified as herself in male form.

In the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa Paramātman mentions Kumārasvāmī [Skanda] as the ideal commander-in-chief[4]. His spear is called Śakti and it is indeed Parāśakti in the form of a weapon. And with this weapon he performs great feats, achieves great victories. Since, as the chief of the celestial army, he went to war in the cause of the devas, Indra tagged on to him during these campaigns. Mahāviṣṇu has the name of Upendra, one who "adheres" to Indra. How did he get the name? During his incarnation as Vāmana he was born to Aditī and Kāśyapa, Indra's parents, hence the name of Upendra [since he came after Indra]. The Ācārya uses that name here:"Viśākha-Indropendra": "Viśākha, Indra, Upendra." Once, after taking part in a war between the celestials and the asuras and emerging victorious in it, Kumārasvāmī returned home—that is the home of Śiva and Śakti—with his companions, Indra and Upendra. They had one purpose: to have Ambā's ucchiṣṭa prasāda (the remnants of her betels as prasāda).

Before the incarnation of Kumārasvāmī, the celestials had once won a victory in war over the asuras. They were then proud that it was because of their own prowess that they had achieved success. Parāśakti, who is the source of all śakti, reduced them to such a lamentable state as that of grass and they found themselves unable to move even the flimsiest of objects. Wisdom then dawned on Indra first who was also the first to learn to be humble. And Ambā out of compassion taught him Brahmavidyā and brought him the realisation that the Brahmaśakti is the source of all strength: that is the one plenary Śakti divides itself into parts to become the support of various objects (or śaktis). This story occurs in the *Kenopaniśad.*

Viśākha (Kumārasvāmī or Subrahmaṇya), Indra and Upendra knew that it was due to Ambā's grace, her prasāda, that they had become victorious. They wished to offer the laurels of their victory at her feet and they came rushing to pay their obeisance to her and also receive her prasāda in the form of the remains of her tāmbūla.

Ambā feeds others and she never thinks of taking food herself. She accepts the naivedya[g], the offerings made to her by her devotees, by her children. But it is for their satisfaction and for them to partake of them later as her prasāda. She does not need to take any food in her own home. It is enough for her to take betels. And that is what she does. [The Gurudeva continues with a smile...] When you chew betels your appetite is reduced.

In her home it is for Svāmī (Parameśvara) that there is plenty of food, nivedanam and so on. The idea is that at least then he will not go roaming with his begging bowl. Now, when Subrahmaṇyasvāmī, Mahāviṣṇu and Indra are back (from the battlefield), Śiva has already had his meal and there is much prasāda left. But the three do not touch it. They run after the remnants of Mother's tambūla, preferring them to what is left-over from Father's food. For this the Ācārya gives a subtle reason: "Caṇḍāṁśa...... nirmālya-vimukhaiḥ," "averse to Caṇḍikeśvara's share of the praśada." What is the reference here? Caṇḍikeśvara has the first right to the left-over from what is offered to Parameśvara. What is left over from the offerings made to Śiva must be made over as an oblation to Caṇḍikeśvara; only then can others receive it. We regard all this as our great good fortune. Caṇḍikeśvara was born like us on earth, as a mortal, but because of his devotion became the fifth member of Parameśvara's family—Parameśvara, Ambā, Gaṇapati, Subrahmaṇya, Caṇḍikeśvara. In temple festivals [in the South] it is these five deities that are taken out in procession and it is called "*Pañcamūrti purappāḍu.*" We accept as specially sacred the left-over from Śiva's offerings as that of that god's prasāda as well as that of Caṇḍikeśvara. However, Śiva's son (Subrahmaṇya), the one (that is Viṣṇu) who, like Ambā, has obtained half the body of Śiva[5] and the king of the celestials (Indra) do not feel happy about receiving what is left - over from the food partaken of by one who rose to the position of an immortal (deva) from that of a mortal. This is referred to by the words "Caṇḍāmśa-vimukhaiḥ." The three were averse to the idea of sharing the left-over of the offerings made to Śiva. "Vimukhaiḥ" means they turned their face away from the left-over.

"With the grace of our Mother we have won victory over the asuras. This victory was a gift to us from her; it was charity received from her. We must prostrate ourselves before her as an act of thanksgiving and receive her prasāda," so the three say to themselves and rush to her place. As they do so they make this resolve: "We must go to her place as beggars, as her children, and fall at her feet. We must not approach her wearing our uniforms, displaying our valour or with the swagger of generals." So they go to see Ambā after casting away their headgear. Even when people go to catch a thief they wear a turban as a protection against blows aimed at the head. Policemen and soldiers wear caps, helmets, and so on according to their rank. But when approaching great people or elders the upper cloth (aṅgavastra), the turban, etc., must not be worn. It is in this way that the three, Subrahmaṇya, Viṣṇu and Indra, remove their headgear. "Apahṛta śirastraiḥ"; "śirastra" means a helmet, that which protects the head; "apahṛta" means discarded. Ambā's pet son, beloved sahodara (brother) and dear disciple approach her. The Ācārya uses the word "sahodara", brother, for Viṣṇu because to use any word meaning "elder brother" [which he is] would not be appropriate in the context.

While paying obeisance to great people, to a king, to men occupying high positions, it is proper to remove one's headgear. But earlier in the hymn we saw that the deities who prostrated themselves at the feet of Ambā were wearing their crowns. In fact, those glittering crowns served the purpose of the nīrājana performed to Ambā. When Ambā went to receive her husband Śiva, she was about to trip on the crowns of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Indra and others, so it was said. How do we reconcile what was mentioned in the earlier stanzas with the present statement about the headgear worn by Subrahmaṇya, Viṣṇu and Indra? We must take it that, urged by their devotion, the deities mentioned in the earlier stanzas failed to observe "protocol" and fell at the feet of Ambā like trees uprooted. If the three gods mentioned in the present stanza have removed their headgear, as they pay obeisance to Ambā, it is because they have acted according to what is dictated by worldly custom.

The Ācārya who says that the three removed their helmets mentions specifically that they did not divest themselves of their armour. "Apahṛta śirastraiḥ kavacibhih"—they were wearing their armour. Strictly speaking they must remove their armour also. When you come to see me don't you remove your shirts? The armour is a kind of shirt. Then why did the three gods not remove the armour they were wearing considering that they took care to discard their helmets?

One reason occurs to me. Whether it is helmet, crown or turban, it is easily removed: it can just be lifted up and kept aside. When Subrahmaṇya, Viṣṇu and Indra come running to see Ambā it is not difficult for them to remove their helmets. But it is different with the armour. The armour is fixed to the body with buttons, screws, straps and so on and it cannot be easily removed, and demands patience. The three great gods who are anxious to see Ambā do not have such patience. They are like children excited by the prospect of seeing their Mother. And they are eager to tell her about their victory in the war with the asuras. That is why they come to her with their armour.

With great love, as an act of blessing, Ambā gives them the remains of her betels. Tāṁbūla is highly auspicious. What to say of the tāṁbūla of Ambā, the Supreme Goddess?

One more point. Tāṁbūla signifies victory also. "*Veṟṟilai*" [Tamiḷ for betel]: in fact the English "betel" is from the Tamil/Malayālam "*veṛṛu ilai.*" It is *merely* leaf, the betel creeper yielding neither flower nor fruit. That is why the betel leaf is called *veṟṟilai*, so I have heard. But "*veṟṟu ilai*" can also be taken as "*veṟṟi ilai*", ("victory leaf"). Is it not right for Ambā to give her betel prasāda (*veṟṟilai prasāda*) to the *veṟṟi-vīras*, to the victorious heroes? It is also a blessing that will ensure their victory in their further exploits.

The Ācārya, however, does not ascribe any such virtue to the remnants of Ambā's betels. He merely says: "Mother, the remnants of your betels are being swallowed, mouthful after mouthful, by Viśākha, Indra and Upendra."

Why has the Ācārya not mentioned the benefits (the fruits) yielded by the prasāda? It is because it is not possible to enumerate all of them.

The benefit generally mentioned of taking Ambā's tāṁbūla prasāda is poetic genius. Kālidāsa, Kālamegha Pulavar and Mūka partook of this prasāda of the Mahākāli of Ujjayinī, the Akhilāṇḍeśvarī of Jambukeśvaram [near Tiruci] and the Kāmākṣī of Kāñcī — in that order—and that is why they became great poets. In the hymn *Ambāṣṭaka*, composed by him, the Ācārya says that by taking the remains of Ambā's betels one would be blessed with the gift of composing poetry that gallops like a high-bred steed.

In the *Saundaryalaharī*, however, the Ācārya says in one place (Stanza 75) that it is the milk of Ambā's breast that gives one the poetic muse and in another place (Stanza 98) he says that it is the sacred water of her feet that gives the same blessing. There is no mention of the remnants of her betels conferring poetic genius.

When he speaks about the water sanctified by Ambā's feet, the Ācārya observes that it gives the same gift of poetry as that given by the remnants of Sarasvatī's betels: "Vānī-mukha-kamala-tāmbūlam." This sacred water is red in colour because of the lac smeared on Ambā's feet and it resembles in colour the juice of betels. "Kalitālaktakarasam": water mixed with shellac; the word "lac" is derived from "laktakam" or "lākṣā."

The Ācārya asks in all humility: "When will I, a vidyārthī, obtain that sacred water of your feet?" "Vidyārthī" means student, one who desires to acquire vidyā, learning. The Ācārya was guru to the whole world and he was a master of both Brahmavidyā and Śrīvidyā and yet he calls himself a mere pupil. When he says that people who are born deaf pour out poetry as a blessing conferred on them by the sacred water of Ambā's feet, he must have, it seems, foreseen the birth of the poet Mūka.

He asks movingly: "When will I drink that water sanctified by your (Ambā's) feet?" "Kadā kāle pibeyam?" Tāyumānavar cries out with equal poignancy: *"Ennalo, ennalo"* (When? When?).

Altogether there is no mention here that the juice of the betels chewed by Ambā makes one a poet. If it were so mentioned the question would arise: "What poetry has Subrahmaṇya, Viṣṇu and Indra composed?" So the tāmbūla rasa of Ambā [the juice of the betels chewed by her] must be regarded as part of the reception accorded to war heroes. It gives them the strength to achieve victories in future and it also brings them jñāna. Or we must take it that the Ācārya does not mention the blessing derived from taking the remnants of Ambā's betels since they are too many to be enumerated.

Notes & References

[1] Tāmbūla consists of betel leaves (piper betel), arecanut pieces or *supari*, spices (and lime or *cuṇā).*

[2] What remains after the tāmbūla is chewed.

[3] This is according to the *Kenopaniṣad.*

[4] Purodhasāṁ ca mukhyaṁ māṁ viddhi Partha Bṛhaspatim
Senānīnām aham Skandaḥ sarasām asmi sāgaraḥ
— *Bhagavadgītā*, 10.24.

[5] The reference here is to Śaṅkaranārāyaṇa.

Chapter 92

The Praise that Shames

Vipañcyā gāyantī vividham apadānam Paśupateḥ
Tvayārabdhe vaktuṁ calitaśirasā sādhuvacane
Tadīyair mādhuryair apalapita tantrīkalaravām
Nijām vīṇām Vāṇī niculayati colena nibhṛtam

In this stanza (66), the Ācārya paints a picture that has the character of a dramatic scene. A drama is staged before an assembly and this dramatic scene is enacted before the court of Ambā.

Ambā is listening to a music recital and finds delight in it. When you are in a joyous mood you feel like listening to music. When you are burdened with work or are worried about something you do not feel like listening to a music performance. To meditate on Ambā as an embodiment of joy [listening happily to music] is to bring us a sense of tranquillity.

Whose music recital is Ambā listening to?

Sarasvatī's. Sarasvatī is playing the vīṇā and singing at the same time. The one with whose grace music and literature are created, she, Sarasvatī, is herself singing literary pieces set to music and playing the vīṇā at the same time. If the presiding deity of music herself sings, and plays the vīṇā, can we imagine how sweet the music would be, the emotions evoked by the song sung?

"Vipañcyā" means on the vipañcī. "Vipañcī" means a vīṇā which is also called "Parivādinī." Sarasvatī's vīṇā has a name of its own, "Kacchapī." The weapons, musical instruments and so on associated with gods and goddesses or with great men have names of their own. The bow of Īśvara is "Pināka"; hence he is "Pinākapāṇī." Mahāviṣṇu's bow is "Śārṅga", so he is "Śārṅgapāṇī." Arjuna's bow is "Gāṇḍiva". When we come to the vīṇā, we see that Nārada has in his hand the vīṇā called "Mahatī." The names of Nārada and Tumburu are usually clubbed together. Tumburu's vīṇā is "Kalāvatī." Sarasvatī's vīṇā is "Kacchapī", as already mentioned. The word means a tortoise. The Kacchapī vīṇā's resonating bowl is shaped like a tortoise, hence the name. According to Professor Sāṁbamūrti[1], even today this type of vīṇā is found in the Philippines; it is called there "*katjapi.*" In the *Sahasranāmam* occurs the name "Nija-sallāpa-mādhurya-vinir-bhartsita-kacchapī." It is the idea contained in this that the Ācārya has developed into a dramatic scene. But, instead of using the term "Kacchapī", he gives the common name of the vīṇā, "vipañcī."

"Vipañcyā gāyanti" means playing the vīṇā, creating music by playing the vīṇā: this is the literal meaning. I interpret the words to mean, "playing the vīṇā and at the same time singing." On what basis do I say so? On that of the following words in the stanza: "vividham apadānam Paśupateḥ." "Paśupateḥ = Parameśvara's; "vividham" = different, various; "apadānam" = stories of a sublime character. So, altogether, the words mean Sarasvatī plays on the vīṇā accounts set to music of Śiva's noble character. The sport [or exploits of a god or anyone for that matter] can be described only through words. When the story of Īśvara's sport is set to music, its beauty must be combined with the literary charm of the narration. And the story will be understood only if it is rendered vocally. That is why I say that Sarasvatī also sang as she played the vīṇā.

All of us feel elated when we are praised. But, actually, people praise us either out of ignorance or because they have some ulterior motive, like getting something out of us, some work done by us for them. If there is nothing in us that makes us worthy of being praised, what about Ambā? No one can sing her glory fully because it has no limits.

But does Sarasvatī sing Ambā's fame or her sport as she plays the vīṇā? No. It is the story of Parameśvara that she sings; it is his praises that she sings. This is what the Supreme Goddess, Ambā, likes, Ambā who is a gem among pativratās. Sarasvatī knows Ambā's mind, she knows everything: she is called "sarvajñā." Those like the Ācārya who ascended the sarvajña-pīṭha, the seat of omniscience, did so after answering all her questions, after conquering her [in learned debate] and receiving her blessings. Sarasvatī knows everything: she knows

Ambikā's mind, and sings the praises of Īśvara, expatiating on his various qualities, with her own vīṇā as accompaniment. The glory of Parameśvara is as boundless as Ambā's. Sarasvatī sings his glory (as far as she knows it) playing the vīṇā at the same time.

When musicians perform before an assembly of the rich or of powerful people, they sing according to their likes and dislikes (they sing or play an instrument in such a manner as to receive the maximum reward from those before whom they perform). Sarasvatī too knows how to please the one before whom she sings and plays the vīṇā. If she were to play the vīṇā in the presence of Īśvara she would sing Ambā's glory for that is what would please him. Now before Ambā she sings the glory of Parameśvara so as to make Ambā happy.

The sannidhi (presence) is Ambā's, that is the performance is taking place in the presence of Ambā. The one who sings is Sarasvatī. And it is not only a recital of vocal music but also a vīṇā recital: indeed the vīṇā is Kacchapī which is famed for its sweet strains. And, altogether, there is a shower of nectarine music. The theme of the music is the sport of Īśvara. Thus everything about the recital is sublime in character.

At the beginning of his *Śivānandalaharī* the Ācārya says that the Śivānanda, the bliss of Śiva, flowing from the story of Parameśvara fills the lake of his consciousness. It is in such Śivānanda that Ambā is now immersed. Even to read accounts of Śiva's sport is to obtain bliss. What then if we listen to these accounts set to tune by Sarasvatī and sung by herself?

Ambā is absorbed in it and steeped in the joy of listening to the music, to the accounts of Śiva's sport, and now and then shaking her head [in appreciation of Sarasvatī's recital] — "calita śirasā", by shaking her head.

Applause expressed by the clapping of hands is "karaḥkaṁpa"; shaking the head in appreciation of something is "śiraḥkaṁpa." There is not much delicacy in the former and Ambā shows her appreciation only by her śiraḥkaṁpa.

The musician feels encouraged when listeners show their appreciation of his performance. The good points in a recital must be noted and the fact that we take delight in the performance must be made known to the artist at once. Even if a musician does not sing well, we must give him encouragement so that he might come out with one or two good saṅgatis.

Appreciation must be whole-hearted. We must not sit through a performance putting on a long face, nor must we adopt a superior air while listening to it. Also we must not assume that we alone are conversant with the art and keep pointing out faults in the performance. When the musician discovers that the listener is out to find fault with his singing [or playing an instrument] he will become nervous and his imagination will suffer. Such is the case not only with music but also with writing, learning, and sports.

Sarasvatī gives an amazingly great performance and Ambā listens to it with delight and keeps encouraging her.

What I have told you so far relates to the first line of the stanza: "vipañcyā gāyantī vividham apadānam Paśupateḥ": "as Sarasvatī sings the song containing the many different accounts of Parameśvara's sport, and plays the vīṇā at the same time..." The name of Sarasvatī does not occur in the line; it does in the fourth line as "Vāṇī."

As Sarasvatī plays the vīṇā....What after that?

"Tvayārabdhe vaktuṁ calitaśirasā sādhuvacane": "calitaśirasā" = shaking her head — I have already dealt with this; "tvayā" = by you (by Ambikā, since the Ācārya is addressing her); "sādhuvacanam" = words of appreciation, congratulation; "vaktum ārabdhe" = as (she) started to speak.

Ambā who was shaking her head in appreciation of Sarasvatī's recital thought that that was not enough and that she must speak one or two words to compliment her. And she started speaking those words. "Sādhu vacanam" = words of appreciation. During music recitals, we express our appreciation of the performance by exclaiming, *"Bale! Bheṣ! Sābāś!"*[2] These are part of sādhuvacana. During public speeches the audience exclaims, "Hear! Hear!" which words are also sādhuvacana.

In this way one or two words similar to "*Bheṣ*!" or "*Sābāś*!" came from Ambā's mouth.

Ambā's mind was filled with joy and from her throat issued sādhuvacana, pleased with Sarasvatī's performance. She spoke just one or two words; the sādhuvacana was not complete. "Ārabdhe" = just as she started to speak.....

What happened as Ambā started to speak, as she just began to compliment Sarasvatī?

"Tadīyaiḥ mādhuryaiḥ apalapita-tantrīkalaravām."

"Tadīyaiḥ" = its, that is of the vacana. Ambā had just begun to speak; "mādhuryaiḥ" = by its sweetness; "apalapita" = disgraced; "tantri" = strings (wires of the vīṇā). Telegrams are transmitted through wires, so for the English "wire" we have the (Tamiḷ) equivalent *tanti*; "kalaravām" = sweet sound.

The third line means: "Sarasvatī, having observed that the melodious strains of the strings of the vīṇā were disgraced by the sweetness of the words that Ambā had just begun to speak..."

"What sound is the sweetest?" If we put this question to ourselves our answer would be: the sound of the vīṇā of Sarasvatī, the goddess of all arts. There can be nothing to equal it in mellifluence, the strains produced by its strings, so we should believe. If at all there is anything to equal it, it can only be the voice of Sarasvatī, so we should think.

However, as Ambā began to speak ... Note that what she did was not sing but speak one or two words and that too without any prāsa or anuprāsa.... Well, as she began to speak, that is as no more than a few syllables had been heard from her, Sarasvatī and her vīṇā were silenced: her voice and the sound of her vīṇā were "defeated" by the voice of Ambā, by the sound of what little she had spoken. We saw that compared to the nectar of the moonlight of Ambā's face the nectar of the real moonlight was like sour gruel. Similarly, the sweetness of Ambā's voice, which was heard only for a moment, was such as to wipe out the impression created by the melody of the voice of Sarasvatī who had been singing for so long and of the strains of the vīṇā she had been playing at the same time.

As her voice was vanquished by Ambā's, Sarasvatī stopped singing, held her head down in shame. The vīṇā was disgraced. What did Sarasvatī do now?

"Nijām vīṇām Vāṇī niculayati colena nibhṛtam."

"Nijām" = one's; her own ; "vīṇām" = vīṇā (objective case); "colena" = with the cover or case; "nibhṛtam" = concealed; "niculayati" = covers. In the sweetness of Ambā's speech the sound of the vīṇā was vanquished; so Sarasvatī slips the instrument into its case.

Ordinary musicians would not concede that any other of their ilk is better than they. But Sarasvatī is different. She whole-heartedly accepted the fact that the strains of her vīṇā were poor compared to Ambā's beautiful voice. She did not continue to sing or play the vīṇā even though she had received Ambā's compliments. She stopped playing and put the instrument back in its case.

Even though her own voice is so honeyed, in her magnanimity Ambā had praise for Sarasvatī's music and she nodded her head in appreciation of it. She did so in order to honour her. But Sarasvatī, instead of being further enthused, hung her head in shame. Here we see the magnanimity of both Ambā and of Sarasvatī.

"Like a moth displaying itself before the sun, I demonstrated my art of music before one who is so sweet-throated," thus Sarasvatī thought to herself, holding her head down.

If this is the case with Sarasvatī, what about her vīṇā? Was it not holding its head high haughtily? By "head" is meant its resonating pot or bowl shaped like a big tortoise. After being vanquished by Ambā's voice, how could it stick its head out? When a man becomes insolvent, people refer to him thus: "He goes about with his head covered." When warriors, heroes, are disgraced in battle they take to flight with their heads covered. According to the śāstras we [that is sannyāsins] have always to keep our heads covered with a cloth.

Sarasvatī decided that the vanquished vīṇā must not show its face to the world any more. She was truthful; so even if Ambā had praised her vīṇā "recital", she put the vipañcī back into its case.

A musician can stop his singing abruptly. Playing a stringed instrument is not like that. It has what is called "anuraṇana": that is when you pluck the strings they keep resonating (or vibrating) for a few moments even after you release them from your fingers. The resonance or *rīṅgāra* dies away only gradually. When you ring a bell its sound, *ding, ding, ding*, takes moments to die away. Stringed instruments are like that. After Ambā had spoken in praise of Sarasvatī's performance, Sarasvatī could stop singing at once but the resonance of her vīṇā took moments to fade away. That is why she put it in its case as if telling it, "Keep your mouth shut." We may interpret the scene presented in the stanza in many such ways, finding delight in its poetic content.

Another point occurs to me. It is true that Ambā was happy as Sarasvatī sang, and she shook her head and spoke a few words of appreciation. But was it all meant for Sarasvatī's music? If not, what was she appreciating? The theme of Sarasvatī's music was the sport of Īśvara. And is it not likely that Ambā paid more attention to the story of her husband told through the music, the text than to the music itself? And for that reason she might have shaken her head in appreciation. Or she should have found delight in the literary quality of the text. After listening to the sweet voice of Ambā, Sarasvatī too could have thought thus: "Ambā who has such a honeyed voice could not have appreciated my music. She must have found delight in the account of Īśvara's sport or its high literary quality. But like a fool I thought she liked my music and continued my performance." This could have increased her sense of shame.

On the whole the stanza presents a dramatic scene. There is the presence of Ambā; Sarasvatī plays the vīṇā and sings; the compositions deal with the sport of Parameśvara, his exploits; Ambā shakes her head delighted by the performance and expresses a few words of appreciation; after experiencing the unparalleled sweetness of Ambā's voice Sarasvatī hangs her head in shame and slips her vīṇā back into its case. This is a scene that we must visualise with our mind.

"Colena" means with the cover or case, so I told you. "Coli" is cover. "La" and "ḷa" are interchangeable—so "colī" can also be "coḷī." For inanimate objects "coḷī" means cover; for men it is a shirt or jacket. I understand that nowadays the jacket or blouse worn by women is called "coḷī." There is a cereal called "colam" (maize or corn). There are small grains packed into an ear of corn. And since it has a cover the corn-cob is called *"colam"*. "Uraiyur" — *"urai"* in Tamiḷ means cover or case— was appropriately enough the capital of the Cola kingdom.

The Ācārya has blessed us with this stanza in the course of his portrayal of Ambā. And he has composed it in such a manner that we are lost in wonder about the beauty of her speech. He also makes us aware that with her blessings we can acquire proficiency both in music and in letters.

Note & Reference

[1] A well-known musicologist and author of several books on Carṇātic music.

[2] Such exclamatory words of appreciation in the South must have been borrowed from the Mahārāṣṭrians of Tañjāvūr or from the North.

Chapter 93

Creases in the Throat

The Male White and the Female Red

The *Saundaryalaharī* has another stanza (69) associating Ambā with music.

Gale rekhāstisro gati-gamaka-gītaika-nipuṇe
Vivāha-vyānaddha-praguṇaguṇa-sankhyā-pratibhuvaḥ
Virājante nānāvidha-madhura-rāgākara-bhuvām
Trayāṇām grāmāṇām sthiti-niyama-sīmāna iva te.

Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda, the omniscient, knew all the 64 arts. This stanza shows how extensive and intensive his knowledge of music was. It contains a number of technical terms like "gati", "gamaka", "gīta" and "grāma". Only musicians will be familiar with them, though those who are mere performing artists may not know all about them. Only those who have studied the theory of music, musicologists, will know all. The above terms will be found explained in the last part of Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra,* in Śārṅgadeva's *Saṅgītaratnākara* and in Venkaṭamakhi's *Caturdaṇḍiprakāśikā*[1]. My understanding of the subject is incomplete and to speak to you about it would be to tax your brain. "Gati" refers to what we now call "tisra", "miśra" and "khaṇḍa[2]" according to the "mātrās" [time units] of the tālas. Gati in Tamiḷ is called *"naḍai"* and we have thus *khaṇḍanaḍai, tisranaḍai,* etc. "Gamaka" is "oscillating", "shaking" a note, ornamenting it, or adding grace to it. The "gāndhāra" in the rāga Toḍi and the ṛṣabha in Śaṅkarābharaṇam[3] are to be sung with gamakas. "Gīta" we know means a song. The Ācārya speaks of Ambā as "gati-gamaka-gīta-eka-nipuṇā": "one without a second in her proficiency in gati, gamaka and gīta". But he uses the terms not in the way we understand them but in a technical sense, that is strictly according to the śāstra. According to this, "gati" denotes "mārga" and "deśi". These are two paths in music. Gati itself means path or way and mārga also means the same thing. Mārga is a systematised school and the music in it is according to the path laid down in the śāstras -- it is like a railway track. The rāgas and tālas in it follow a system created by musicologists of the past and one has to adhere to a strict discipline in practising it. "Deśi" is less rigorous, less bound by any system and in it importance is given to "rañjakatvam" or what is pleasing. It has been evolved by musicians in different parts of India and the practitioners have a greater sense of freedom in it. "Gamaka" as said before is oscillation and it has five categories governed by the time measure. And "gīta" consists not only of sāhitya or text but also of the svaras appropriate to it.

Then there is "grāma" which is classified into three in music. This comes later in the stanza. Grāma means division of rāgas based on the ṣadja, madhyama and gāndhāra svaras — "sa-grāma", "ma-grāma" and "gā-grāma. All the three are known only in the celestial world. In our world it seems sa-grāma and ma-grāma have existed long centuries ago. There is no gā-grāma. This is according to the commentator [Lakṣmīdhara] of the *Saundaryalaharī* who lived five or six hundred years ago. I asked our musicologists about this and they said that there was only one grāma now, the sa-grāma. [The Mahāsvāmī demonstrates by actually singing the svaras of this grāma.] The sa-grāma alone is in vogue today.

Vocal music originates in the throat. The human musical instrument, the sound box, is in it. The Ācārya observes that the three grāmas exist in Ambā's throat as the three creases or folds in her neck.

All women have three folds, three lines, in their throat. Ambā, of course, has them. And it is because she has had them from the very beginning of Time that all women have them to show that they are indeed manifestations of her form.

All men have a round projection in their throats but not women. It is called the Adam's apple. They say [according to Christianity or the Semitic tradition] it is because Adam, the first man, ate the apple that carnal love sprang in his heart and, as a consequence, what we call "saṁśāra" came into being. The apple he ate partly stuck in his throat and so all males born after him (just as we take after our great-grandmother, grandfather, etc) have the Adam's apple.

According to our śāstras, Parameśvara swallowed the Kālakūṭa poison making it into a pill. Then Ambā held his throat with her hands to prevent the poison from going further down and it got stuck in the throat itself. It is the round object (the poison he took) in Parameśvara's throat that is seen as the Adam's apple in all men. Indeed it shows the universality of Parameśvara, that he is present in everybody.

The two stories show that there is a common source or origin for all of us. So all of us are brethren, all of us form one kinship. The apple which is sweet and healthy—"An apple a day keeps the doctor away"—becomes the cause of the terrible saṁsāra, the cause of our worldly existence. But when we regard Īśvara as the root of everything, as the source of all of us, even the bitter and terrible poison becomes ambrosia in his compassion for all beings and it does not do harm to anyone.

It is to show that all men are Īśvara and all women are Ambā that the former have the Adam's apple in their throat and the latter have the three lines in the neck.

In Tiruvaiyāru, Apparsvāmigal[g] saw elephants, peacocks, haṁsas, parrots of both genders as Śiva and Śakti and exclaimed: "I saw his sacred feet, I saw what is not seen." If we have devotion, and use our intelligence a bit, we will see the Śiva-Śakti pair everywhere.

Have I not been explaining, on the basis of the spectrum, that Śiva is white, that Śakti is red, that from the quiescent and functionless Śiva has come Kāmeśvarī who is red in colour and that it is the functioning principle? It is amazing how in life in this world—as well as life in the next—white and red join together in manifold ways in the same manner as Śiva and Śakti. To appreciate this phenomenon would be like having a glimpse of that divine couple. If we realise that matters relating to men are white and those relating to women are red, we will learn to look upon the world as a manifestation of Śiva and Śakti.

A man's śukla or semen, what may be regarded as his very essence, is white. The word śukla itself means white. Similarly a woman has her "śoṇitam" (menstrual flow) which is red — the word itself means red. The vibhūti or sacred ashes a man wears is white while the kuṁkuma a woman wears is red. Vaiṣṇavas wear the nāmam[g]: the white outer part of it represents Perumāḷ or Viṣṇu while the vertical red line in the centre represents the Mother (Lakṣmī) — the line is indeed called "Śrīcūrṇam". The *veṣṭi* or *dhoti* that a man wears is white while the *sāri* that a woman wears is red. "Kusuṁbhā" means saffron: it is this colour that befits the *sāri*. That is why even today the *kūrapuḍavai* or the *sāri* made as an offering to Ambā is lac-coloured. In the *Sahasranāmam* the colour of the *sāri* worn by Ambā is referred to as "aruṇāruna-kausūṁbham".

Among the examples of white and red combining together: our blood looks red but it consists of red and white corpuscles. Just as the white Śiva becomes the red Kāmeśvara in Ambā's red, the red corpuscles conceal the white of the white corpuscles.

Round the *kolam*[g] we draw we use red *kāvi* or ochre: we also use it inside it. The walls of temples are painted with alternating white and ochre stripes. Even though Viṣṇu or Perumāḷ is blue-complexioned, the walls of his temples are similarly painted (with red and white stripes).

Take the abhiṣeka[g] performed to a deity: we use milk and honey in it.

The scented offering we make consists of white camphor and saffron and the flowers we use in pūjā have white jasmines and red *arali (nerium)*. The food we offer to the gods consists of "curd rice" and sweet rice ["*cakkara poṅgal*" in Tamiḷ, rice cooked with jaggery which is brown-coloured.] Even *sāmbār-bhāt* is red while we have a combination of white *iḍḍali* with red *milagā-poḍi* [powder made of red chillies and other ingredients.]

In the *iḍḍali*-chilli powder combination, *iḍḍali* is white and looks innocuous while the powder is "fierce" being pungent. The white flag stands for truce, for peace, the red flag for revolution and revolt: we have here the Śiva-sānti and Śakti-rājasa manifestations. As if Śiva and Śakti must not be separated in this manner totally, it is the white corpuscles in our blood that "quarrel" with the bacteria and viruses that cause disease while the red corpuscles are peaceful, feeding oxygen to the body and promoting growth. When blood is spilled in war it is the Red Cross that treats the injured and the ill.

In the spectrum red adheres to white, as if coming next to it. Opposite to red is violet. That is why opposite to Śiva, who represents śānta or peace, are the blue-complexioned Viṣṇu (and blue is allied to violet), the blue Viṣṇu-Durga and the black Kālī, all representing Māyā in full. Kāmeśvarī, who is red, touches śānta and goes up to the edge of Māyā...

Hence it is that in the "Pādukā Mantra" of "Tattva Śikhara" it is said that the brilliant light that is the cause of the gross and the subtle is known as "Traipuram Mahas". While speaking about the expansion of the living world emanating from it, this is noted as "Rakta-śukla-prabhā-miśram." It is this mixture of the red and the white that pertains to the running of the outward actions and also to the inward tranquillity of man.

The aspects of Śiva and Śakti manifested outwardly in men and women are the Adam's apple and the three creases in the neck. The Ācārya refers to these lines in the stanza by the words "gale rekhāḥ tisraḥ". Ambā is proficient in gati, gamaka and gīta and what the Ācārya says in the stanza can be taken to mean that the three subjects are symbolised by the three folds in her neck. This is not a matter of conjecture because it is explicitly stated that the three rekhās "in your neck demarcate the ṣaḍja, gāndhāra and madhyama grāmas of music": "trayāṇām grāmāṇām sthiti-niyama-sīmāna iva te gale rekhāstisro virājante."

In an earlier stanza (25) occurs the words, "trayāṇām devānam triguṇa-janitānām". The Ācārya spoke there of the three deities originating from the three guṇas. Here (in this stanza) he refers obliquely, in the second line, to the three guṇas. What he expressly states here in the form of a simile is something everybody can understand. He speaks about the supremely auspicious marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī: "vivāha-vyānaddha-praguṇaguṇa-sankhyā-pratibhuvaḥ".

Īśvara performed the māṅgalya-dhāraṇa[g] of Ambā, did he not? "Vivāha-vyānaddhaḥ" = tied during the marriage. What is that maṅgala-sūtra like? "Guṇa-sankhyā" = with a number of guṇas. "Praguṇa" means with guṇa of a lofty character. "We are unable to understand anything from the statement that the maṅgalasūtra is of a high quality with its number of guṇas".

When enumerating the guṇas, the Ācārya mentions the three, sattva, rajas and tamas. The "guṇa" in "praguṇa" is a thread, that is Ambā's māṅgalya-sūtra consists of the three threads that are the three guṇas and made together. The three creases in Ambā's neck are a reminder of the three guṇas, a "guarantee" for them: "pratibhuvaḥ" means guarantee. There is an inner meaning to this, that the three lines are a metaphor for the three guṇas.

"Pāṇigrahaṇa" [the bride and the groom holding each other's hands] is the most important rite in a marriage ceremony and it is purely Vedic. This rite is universal in our land, observed in all parts of it and by all castes. Some people may say that the wearing of the *tāli* (māṅgalyasūtra-dhāraṇa) is not strictly one of the marriage rites. But it acquires importance in that the Ācārya refers to Īśvara performing the māṅgalya-dhāraṇa of Ambā. In pāṇigrahaṇa no permanent mark of saumāṅgalya is left. The hands are clasped and then released and there is nothing more to it. The māṅgalyasūtra has been the mark of sumaṅgalis[g] from time immemorial. Regarding it as worthy of worship, sumaṅgalīs reverently bring it to their eyes as they rise in the morning. Pūjā is performed to it during the time of the conjunction of Māghā and Phālguni [March - April]. In the *Sahasranāmam* occurs this: "Kāmeśa-baddha-māṅgalyasūtra-śobhita-kandharā": "one whose neck shines with the māṅgalyasūtra tied by Kāmeśvara".

The Ācārya uses the word "guṇam", meaning thread (of cotton). But the thread smeared with turmeric for the maṅgalasūtra is no longer fashionable. On the pretext that it becomes dirty married women nowadays wear a gold chain, called *koḍi* (in Tamiḷ), with the *tāli* and beads attached to it. This is very wrong. If the thread gets dirty it can be smeared with turmeric every day. All women, including the poor, have to wear the maṅgalasūtra and the ear-ornament. So Ambā is an example to them since even the very poor can afford the palm-leaf ear-ornament and the maṅgalasūtra of cotton threads. The other ornaments Ambā wears, like the crown encrusted with the nine gems, the gold girdle, are extra, being not compulsory for women.

Ambā's neck has three creases : gati, gamaka and gīta make three; the guṇas are three; and the maṇgalasutra is made of three threads intertwined.

There are a number of sampradāyas or traditions in music and each of them must be preserved in its pristine form. The three grāmas or scales must not be intermingled. These are represented by the three folds in Ambā's neck, folds that demarcate the boundaries of the three grāmas. The Ācārya shows how disciplined one must be in nādopāsanā, worship through sound or music, the quest through music.

If nādopāsanā is pursued with devotion, if one sings with utter devotion, music will show the way for one to have a vision of Īśvara.

When one becomes absorbed in śruti and laya, one becomes absorbed in the Ātman and one is led to the non-dualistic goal. Like Tyāgarāja[4] who sang *"Endaro mahānubhāvulu"*,[5] there have been many who realised the Self through nādopasānā; even today there must be such practitioners of nādopāsanā. Tyāgayya himself was a mahānubhāva. Along with him there were two more who had realisation through music: the three are called the "Trimūrti" (Trinity) of music[6]. Amazingly enough these three lived at the same time, about 150 years ago.

The guṇas are three; sattva, rajas and tamas. But since they combine in different proportions, the attitudes of mind formed as a result, the ways of thinking, of looking at things, are limitless. With the 51 letters of the (Sanskrit) alphabet, hundreds of thousands of words are formed (the number of letters in the English alphabet is almost half of this). Similarly, with the permutation and combination of the seven svaras many, many, rāgas have been formed. This is referred to in the stanza thus: "nānāvidha-madhura-rāgākara-bhuvām", generating a mine of rāgas of different sweetness. We must read this with the fourth line, "the three grāmas that generate them".

"Rāga akaram" means a mine of rāgas. When we keep digging in a mine, gold and precious stones are obtained. In the same way when we keep digging into the mine of svaras more and more rāgas will be thrown up. Since the ocean yields gems it is called "ratnākara". "Karuṇākara" or "Dayākara" is taken to mean "one who bestows compassion"; but the correct meaning is a "mine of compassion".

When the svaras are combined in various ways the resulting rāgas must be pleasing to the ear and must make the mind calm and happy.

Combining svaras in a way that does not please the mind is like performing acrobatics; and such combinations of svaras cannot be true rāgas. That is why the Ācārya says: "nānāvidha-madhura-rāga". Mādhurya, sweetness, is important. Like Ambā of whom he speaks, the Ācārya was omniscient and he had a profound knowledge of music. However, not remaining a mere theorist, he underlines sweetness as the most important characteristic of a rāga.

All the rāgas are enfolded by the three creases in the throat of Ambā. In the throat of Īśvara a deadly poison has been transformed into ambrosia. The projection in his throat (Adam's apple) and the three lines in Ambā's neck remind us of their presence in all men and women and also their universal non-dualistic aspect.

Notes & References

[1] It is generally believed that Bharata belonged to Kāśmīr and lived in the 1st century B.C. Śārṇgadeva belonged to the 13th century. Venkaṭamakhi was the originator of the Melakarta system in Carṇātic music according to which there are 72 parental scales. The Mahāguru was descended from him on his mother's side.

[2 & 3] The Mahāsvāmī is speaking of Carṇātic rāgas and tālas.

[4] Tyāgarāja (Tyāgayya) (1767-1847), the most celebrated of the Carṇātic composers.

5. This is regarded as one of the five gems among Tyāgarāja's compositions. In it he pays obeisance to great men of noble character.

6. The two, apart from Tyāgarāja, are Muttusvāmī Dīkṣitar and Śyāmāśāstrī.

Chapter 94

Beauty of Hands

After describing Ambā's neck the Ācārya speaks about the beauty of her hands in two stanzas (70, 71). Is not the hand usually likened to the lotus? In keeping with this literary tradition, the Ācārya relates one hand of Ambā with Brahmā who sprang from the lotus and the other hand with his (Brahmā's) mother Padmāvatī or Lakṣmī.

Śiva punishes, Ambā protects. If he shows that "awarding punishment is the duty of the father", she shows that "compassion is personified by the mother". Like Parameśvara Brahmā too had originally five heads. But when he committed a wrong, Śiva punished him by plucking off one of his heads and made him "Caturmukha" (four-headed), so goes the story. The Ācārya refers to the story of how Brahmā saved his remaining four heads, the meritorious deed he performed for the same (Stanza 70). This was nothing more than rushing to Ambā for refuge, for abhaya, freedom from fear. In a previous stanza (4) the Ācārya said that Ambā did not grant abhaya with her hand but with her foot. Here it is the beauty of his poetic imagination that makes him give expression to a different idea, that Ambā grants her abhaya with her hand. How many hands does Ambā have? Four. Brahmā has four heads remaining. Who is he, Brahmā? He is "Sarasijabhava", born of the lotus. Ambā's hands are also like lotuses. The hand starting from the shoulder is like the stem of a lotus and the hand at the end of it is like a lotus flower. One lotus helps another being of the same species! Brahmā who rose from the lotus prays to the four lotus hands of Ambā for the safety of his four heads: it is thus that he saved his remaining heads, says the Ācārya.

The Ācārya now thinks that comparing Ambā's hands to lotuses is to depreciate them. So in the next stanza he makes a "correction of the error" by bringing in Lakṣmī. The tapering end of the lotus petal is more red than the rest of it. As for Ambā's hands, the tips of her fingers — the latter having the place of the lotus petals — are more red than the tips of the lotus petals without her having applied any colour or varnish to them (the tips of her fingers). "Can the beauty of such lustre be obtained by the lotus?" asks the Ācārya. "I made a wrong comparison. But did I not do so with the very words gifted by Ambā? Can they yield any wrong meaning? So let me see if I can find an answer to my doubts by taking my imagination further." It is the answer he found for his question that he has expressed in the form of a śloka.

What answer did he find? "Lakṣmī applied lac to her feet with her fingers and with those fingers she playfully pinches the petals of the lotus. Then would not the red lustre of the tips of the lotus petals increase threefold? Will this lustre not come up to that of Ambā's hand? The Ācārya thus tries to justify his comparison.

Even then he does not say that the lotus has the glow of Ambā's hand. All he says is: "kayācidvā sāmyam bhajatu kalayā": "somehow it has only a fraction of that glow".

Since they are associated with Lakṣmī, Ambā's hands confer on us Śrī, all good fortune: such is the import of the stanza.

Chapter 95

Milk of Jñāna

As part of the keśādi-pādānta^{g} description of Ambā, the Ācārya now depicts her bosom in a few stanzas. In one of them (73) he gives the reason for her breast milk being superior to amṛta, the divine ambrosia. The celestials who have had ambrosia are eternally young; they remain middle-aged always. Gaṇapati and Subrahmaṇya who have had Ambā's breast-milk remain eternally boyish and do not age . "Kumārau adyāpi": even today they remain boys.

What is the inner meaning of this? The greatness of Ambā's breast-milk is such that her two children who have had it are jñāna personified and they know no kāma. "Avidita-vadhūsaṅga-rasikau kumarau": they know not what is strībhoga [sexual enjoyment with women]. The Ācārya himself was an example in this matter. The celestials passed from boyhood to middle age and did not age further because of their having partaken of amṛta. But they are all the time after petty pleasures. So the ambrosia of the breast-milk of Ambā who is an ocean of beauty is far superior to that churned out of the ocean of milk.

In the South, Gaṇapati is believed to be a brahmacārin; while Subrahmaṇya has two consorts, Vallī and Devasenā. In the North, Subrahmaṇya is a brahmacarin while Gaṇapati has Siddhī and Buddhī as his consorts. The Ācārya who exemplified the uttermost limits of brahmacarya brings together the Southern Gaṇapati and the Northern Subrahmaṇya. He shows that Ambā's breast-milk is the milk of jñāna.

Chapter 96

The Tamiḷ Child

In a subsequent stanza (75) the Ācārya remarks that Ambā's breast- milk creates poets of jñāna: They compose poetry out of the jñāna acquired by them by virtue of that milk and impart it [the jñāna] to others through their work.

"Mother, your breast-milk produces jñāna, compassion, beauty and all else that is of excellence arising from your heart": "hṛdayataḥ payaḥ pārāvāraḥ parivahati", "rising from your heart as an ocean". It is like the essence of Sārasvatī who is the goddess of learning and the arts: "Sārasvatamiva". "You suckled the Tamiḷ child with that milk of jñāna". The Ācārya speaks of the "Draviḍa-śiśu", Tamiḷ child. What happened to the child by its taking in Ambā's breast-milk? "Kavīnām prauḍhānām ajani kamanīyaḥ kavayitā": it made the child a poet who in attracting the minds [of the learned] became foremost among mature poets.

"Prauḍhakavi" means a poet who can compose poetry rich in substance, pregnant with meaning. A girl who has had her menarche is called prauḍha. Like potency in the body is potency in words and a poet who has it is a "prauḍha kavi". Such poets are likely to hold their heads high; people who are prauḍha will be proud. In their poetry there will be much intellectual jugglery though it may be lacking in elements that touch the heart. From the Supreme Being's breast-milk flows an ocean of milk: "payaḥ pārāvāraḥ parivahati". In this *Saundaryalaharī* so many laharīs have been mentioned and to them is added the laharī of Ambā's breast-milk, the laharī of her motherhood, that is sweeter than anything else. The child who takes in such milk, as the Ācārya observes, becomes a poet and his poems will attract all hearts — "kamanīya" means that— and he will have the distinction of being a prauḍha kavi among prauḍha kavis [a mature poet among mature poets].

This "Draviḍa-śiśu", Tamil child, who drank Ambā's milk of jñāna may seem to us to be Jñānasaṁbandhar[g], author of the *Tevāram*. His period is the 7th century A.D. Roughly speaking the Ācārya lived between late 6th century B.C. and early 5th century. There is a gap of more than a thousand years between the time of the Ācārya and that of Saṁbandhamūrtisvāmigal [same as Jñānasaṁbandhar].

Most commentators of the *Saundaryalaharī* point out that, when the Ācārya was a child, Ambā suckled him, blessed him with her milk. They further say that he is referring to himself, with poetic grace, in the third person as "Draviḍa - śiśu". That is he does not say boastfully, "It was I who drank Ambā's milk of jñāna", but refers to himself in all humility as someone unknown. The language called Malayāḷam came into existence only about a thousand years ago. Until then Tamiḷ was the language there (that is Keraḷa) and it is also part of the Drāviḍa land. So there is plenty of room for the Ācārya referring to himself as Draviḍa - śiśu and it is a matter of great pride for us.

However... I spoke about humility. We saw that it was a special trait of the Ācārya's character. So would one like him, even if he referred to himself in the third person, speak about the child in question becoming the most distinguished among mature poets attracting the hearts of all with his creations? Such a question does arise. But if you gave some thought to it, you would realise that it is not altogether inappropriate. The question here is the greatness of Ambā's breast-milk. When speaking about the potent manner in which it endows one with the genius of poesy, is it not reasonable to illustrate it with an actual, known, example? The Ācārya, we must remember, remaining in a far-off place, prayed to Ambā in all humility for her kaṭākṣa. If such a one claims that Ambā's breast-milk raised him to the position of the universal monarch of poets, does it not mean that, at the same time, he sings the glory of that milk?

There are many stories relating to the Tamiḷ child. Despite the efforts of commentators of the past and researchers of the present, there is no conclusive answer to the question of who the child referred to is. What we need is the thirst for Ambā's milk of jñāna. It does not matter to us, it is not a matter of profit or gain for us, to know who the Draviḍa-śiśu is. We do not also need even the gift of writing poetry. It would be enough if we keep praying to Jñānāmbā for jñāna.

Chapter 97

The Knees of a Pativratā

As the Ācārya continues his keśādipāda depiction of Ambā, after describing her sacred body, *i.e.,* her torso, waist and so on, according to the poetic tradition, he concludes with the goddess's feet. Following the poetic custom, Ambā (the nāyakī, heroine, *talaivi* in Tamiḷ literature) is shown a step above Īśvara, the nāyaka or hero. The Ācārya shows him pining for her. He says that Kāma, who was restored to life by Kāmeśvarī, triumphs over Īśvara, using Kāmeśvarī herself for the purpose. We must read these passages and appreciate them with a pure heart, taking them as composed in accordance with our poetic convention. We must not treat them as representing real life, nor should we elaborate upon them. We can do so only if we have devotion and humility. It is thus that for centuries people have been reading the hymn with religious devotion. The text of the *Saundaryalaharī* is such as to encourage people to take such an attitude while reading it. So there is no need for me to tell you that you must read it "with this or that attitude."

As a poet, Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda shows the heroine (Ambā) to be superior to the hero (Īśvara). But, then, he is also an ācārya and as such he has to show the wife to be a pativratā subservient to the husband—and this he does not forget. That is why, when speaking about the knees of Ambā (Stanza 82), he says: "patyuḥ praṇatikaṭhinābhyām." Ambā's legs are soft like the trunks of elephants and plantain stalks of gold but her knees alone have become hardened. It is the case with everybody but it does not behove a poet to leave it at that. The Ācārya gives a reason for it as a poet but, while doing so, he also speaks as an ācārya concerned with dharma. Ambā is a great pativratā and in her humility she keeps prostrating herself before her husband again and again. When women perform their prostrations they bend in their legs, the middle part of them touching the earth or ground. By constantly, untiringly, making prostrations before Īśvara Ambā's knees become calloused. "Patyuḥ praṇati kaṭhinābhyām": "patyuḥ" = to or before the husband; "praṇati" = prostrating herself; "kaṭhinābhyām" = calloused, hardened; "jānubhyam" = the two knees.

The Ācārya addresses Ambā by two names. One is "Girisute" [that is "Girisutā"]; the other is "Vidhijñe" ["Vidhijñā"]. "Girisutā" means Daughter of the Mountain. Mountain is stone and as the daughter of stone her knees are stony—this idea is hinted at by the Ācārya. Then as a preceptor of dharma, he addresses Ambā as "Vidhijñe", which name means "you who know the injunctions of the śāstras." The *Sahasranāmam* has a name of Ambā which means the one who laid down rules acccording to the Vedas — "Nijājñā-rūpa-nigamā." She herself becomes an example to others by strictly following these rules. That is how, in keeping with the tenets of dharma, the wife prostrates herself before her husband and her knees become hardened. The Ācārya suggests all this by means of using a single word in the vocative, "Vidhijñe."

Chapter 98

The Bhagavatpāda and the Bhagavatīpāda

The Ācārya comes to describe the sacred feet of Ambā, her *Tiruvḍi* [Tamiḷ for scared feet]. These are the feet we must go to and fall at. These are the feet that we must grasp and seek for refuge. We are not asked to grasp the hands or face of Ambā nor her neck. We must hold her feet alone. We must clasp them if we are to be freed from karma and janma [saṁsāra or worldly existence] that have us in their grip.

Can we approach Ambā as we like and hold her feet? We can do so only when she likes our doing so. It is for the sake of this, to hold her feet, that the Ācārya prays to her. Instead of saying, "I must hold your feet", he beseeches her, "You must give them to me so that I may grasp them. Out of your compassion and grace, Mother, you must give your feet for me to hold." "Dayayā dhehi caranau" (Stanza 84)

Śrutīnām mūrdhāno dadhati tava yau śekharatayā
Mamāpyetau Mātaḥ śirasi dayayā dhehi caraṇau
Yayoḥ pādyam pāthaḥ Paśupati-jaṭājūṭa-taṭinī
Yayor-lākṣā-lakṣmīrāruṇa-haricūḍāmaṇi-rucih

While stating that Ambā's milk of jñāna bestows the gift of poesy of an elevated character, poesy that touches the hearts of all, the Ācārya adds that the milk is fed by Ambā herself out of her compassion "dayāvatyā dattam." "Dayayā dhehi", so he says in the present stanza pertaining to her feet. Did he not say in another stanza that Ambā's milk of jñāna is superior to the celestial ambrosia? Similarly he says that the feet that she permits us to hold, out of her compassion, vouchsafe us the ambrosia of the sahasrāra [the one-thousand-petalled lotus in the head, according to Kuṇḍalinī yoga] that is also superior to the amṛta of the celestials and makes us the embodiment of jñāna. An ācārya gives dīkṣā or initiation to his disciple by placing his foot on his head: this is meant to create a flow of nectar in his (the disciple's) sahasrāra.

Our Ācārya is himself an embodiment of jñāna. But here he regards Ambā herself as an ācāryā and prays to her to place her foot on his head: "śiraśi dayayā dhehi caranau.'' Although he asks for Ambā's feet to be placed on his head he does not explicitly state that its purpose is initiation of the disciple by the guru. Matters like initiation are to be kept a secret, so he expresses the idea only obliquely. In the *Kenopaniṣad*, Parāśakti appears as Jñānāṁbikā and gives instruction in jñāna to Indra. The Ācārya hints at this here and says that what we should pray for, what all of us should pray for, is Ambā's prasāda or her grace of jñānāmṛta (ambrosia of jñāna). What is the hint? "Śrutīnām mūrdhano dadhati tava caraṇau śekharatayā" : the indication is in these words. "The Upaniṣads which are the head of Śruti, that is the Vedas, wear your feet as their head ornament.'' In the Daśopaniṣad (the Ten Upaniṣads) there is no reference anywhere to Parameśvara or Mahāviṣṇu appearing as a guru to impart instruction (in jñāna). Not only do they not appear as gurus, they are not mentioned in any other role or context. In the *Kaṭhopaniṣad*[1] the state of liberation is described as all-pervading and it is referred to as "Viṣṇu'' (1.3.9); and when the same is called turīyam it is referred to as "Śivam'', in the sense of auspicious, in the *Māṇḍūkyopaniṣad*[2&3]. These references are to two states, not to two individuals or deities. Ambā is specifically referred to as Umā and Haimavatī in the *Kenopaniṣad* and also as "Strī'', as one who is immensely radiant, "bahuśobhamānā". That she gave instruction to Indra in jñāna is also mentioned[4&5]. Apart from this there is no other basis for the Ācārya to observe that the Upaniṣads wear Ambā as a head ornament.

Instead of saying, ''Mother, place your feet on my head,'' the Ācārya says, "Mamāpi śiraśi'', "on my head too.'' ''On my head too, Mother, place your feet." Thus he shows again his incomparable humility. Earlier in similar manner, he prays to Ambā to bathe him also in her sidelong glance of compassion: "snapaya kṛpayā māmapi". The Ācārya represents the pinnacle of knowledge and wisdom. In his perception of truths, in inward realisation, in his ability to do work, in his power of expression, he occupies the highest place—and yet there is no one humbler than he. He is the highest among those who lower themselves.

"Your feet are an ornament for the Upaniṣads which are the head of Mother Veda. Even Paramaśiva and Mahāviṣṇu prostrate themselves before you, placing their heads on them. On your feet which are the head-ornament of the Upaniṣads flows the Gaṅgā who is the head ornament of Śiva, and who becomes the pādya tīrtha of Ambā [that is the water poured on the feet as arghya, pādya and ācamanīya which are among the sixteen rites of adoring a deity]. The light cast on her feet by the crest-jewel worn by Mahāviṣṇu is the sandal-paste smeared on them. Your feet that you gracefully presented to Mother Veda, to the lords of the Vedas, Īśvara and Viṣṇu and deities like them, how do I deserve to hold the same? But undeserving though I be, you have something called compassion, haven't you? Grace me too, Mother, out of that compassion of yours." "Mātaḥ etau caranau mamāpi śiraśi dayayā dhehi," thus prays the Ācārya with his heart melting in devotion. Earlier when he prayed for Ambā's sidelong glance, he used the word "kṛpayā"; here it is "dayayā".

When the pādya tīrtha is Gaṅgā, it means that Īśvara makes his other wife (sakalatrī) also fall at Ambā's feet. "Saroṣā Gaṅgāyām": when Ambā looks at Gaṅgā, anger comes bubbling up in her eyes. It is to appease her that Īśvara makes Gaṅgā fall at her feet. When the Ācārya speaks of the light of the crest-jewel worn by Mahāviṣṇu imparting Ambā's feet the lustre of *nalangu* he uses the word "lakṣmī" for lustre. "Lākṣa lakṣmī" means the lustre of lac. In using these words the Ācārya suggests that Mahāviṣṇu too makes his wife fall at the feet of Ambā. In a previous stanza he said that the lac on the feet of Lakṣmī, who was seated in the lotus, gave its petals an extra hue of redness, thus making them nearly as red as Ambā's hands. Wondering perhaps whether associating Ambā's hands with Lakṣmī's feet would seem sacrilegious to some, the Ācārya compensates for it by observing that Lakṣmī is present in Ambā's feet in the form of the lustre of lac. I have already spoken to you about Sarasvatī being associated with this matter of lac: that the sacred nectarine water of Ambā's feet, that is the water mixed with lac, endows one with the gift of poetry like Sarasvatī's betel juice. A basic idea expressed by the Ācārya takes root, grows into a tree and branches out in many ways. It would be interesting to do research into the subject.

Brahmā and Viṣṇu went in search of the head and feet of Parameśvara regarded as the Supreme God. Ambā was not engaged in this quest. Here there is no mention of anyone going on a similar search. But the one whose feet Mahāviṣṇu went in search of, that is Īśvara, he himself pays obeisance at Ambā's feet. From the words "lākṣa lakṣmī" we may take it that Mahāviṣṇu prostrates himself before her along with Lakṣmī. Since both of them, Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī, are mentioned we may extend the idea to include their son Brahmā too among those who fall at her feet in devotion. All the three of the Trimūrti may be regarded as making prostrations together before Parāśakti. In the first section of the hymn (in Stanza 25) we saw the Trimūrti paying obeisance to Ambā, keeping their folded hands raised above their heads, thus performing pūjā to the goddess. In the second section also (in Stanza 89) it is said that Ambā's feet are more munificent than the celestial Kalpa tree. The Ācārya observes that the folded hands of celestial women which are shaped like folded lotuses are placed in adoration at the feet of Ambā. He also gives a reason for the lotuses folding. The white toenails of Ambā's red feet look like the rows of teeth in a laughing face that is red-complexioned. The white teeth resemble moonlight; and lotuses fold in moonlight; and that is how the lotuses that are the hands of the celestial maidens are folded.

Ambā's feet are the flowers worn by Mother Veda on her head. Like Brahmā and Viṣṇu going in search of the head and feet of Śiva, the Vedas seek the feet of the Paramātman. The Ācārya notices that they do find those feet. How? Ambā herself must have kept those feet on Mother Veda's head out of her compassion—''dayayā''. "Extending that compassion may my head also obtain those feet,'' so the Ācārya prays to Ambā. He himself becomes an embodiment of those feet, the one who has earned the name of ''Bhagavatpāda''.

References

1 Vijñānasārathiryastu manaḥ pragrahavānnaraḥ
So'dhvanaḥ pāramāpnoti tadviṣṇoḥ paramam padam
— *Kaṭhopaniṣad,* 1.3.9.

2 Nāntaḥprajñam na bahiṣprajñam nobhayataḥprajñam na prajñānaghanam na prajñam nāprajnam. Adṛṣṭam avyvahāryam agrāhyam alakṣaṇam acintyam avyapadeśyam ekātmapratyayasāram prapañcopāśamam śāntam śivam advaitam caturtham manyante sa ātmā sa vijñeyaḥ.
— *Māṇḍukyopaniṣad,* 7.

3 Amātraścaturtho'vyavaharyaḥ prapañcopaśamaḥ śivo'dvaita evamonkāra atmaiva samviśatyatmana'tmanam ya evam veda.
— *Ibid,* 12.

4 "Sa tasminnevākāśe striyamājagāma bahuśobhamanāmumā haimāvatim tā hovāca kimetadyakṣamiti.

— *Kenopanisad,* 3.12

5 Sā brahmeti hovāca brahmaṇo vā etadvijaye mahīyadhvamiti tato haiva vidāñcakāra brahmeti.

— *Ibid,* 4.1.

Chapter 99

The Lotus that Blooms in the Mind-stone

The sacred feet of Ambā are referred to as flowers, as lotuses in fact, "caraṇāravindam". The Ācārya asks Ambā (in Stanza 88): "During your marriage how could your husband place your foot, tender like a flower, on the rocklike grinding-stone?" "Katham va" = how;? "Bāhubhyām" = with his hands; "upayamanakāle" = during your marriage. "Upanayana" is the prelude to the brahmacarya stage of life, while "upayamana" is the start of the householder's stage of life. "Upayamana kale purabhidā" ("Purabhidā" means "by Parameśvara" who slew the Tripura demon); "dṛṣadi nyastam" = placed on the (grinding) stone. The Ācārya who asks like this does not say "how hard-hearted he is"; in fact he says the opposite, "dayamānena manasā", "with a compassionate heart that blesses".

We may put forward two reasons for the Ācārya saying so. An idiot is mockingly or ironically called a "Bṛhaspati". It may be in the same way that the Ācārya here calls Īśvara kind-hearted. Or he means what he says; there is no mockery or irony in it. We must take here the help of the *Śivānandalaharī*. If we make a comparative study of the Ācārya's two Laharīs *(Saundaryalaharī* and *Śivānandalaharī),* see how they complement each other, we will be able to unearth many treasures by way of meaning. In the *Śivānandalaharī* the Ācārya expresses a view that touches our hearts (Stanza 80). He asks Śiva about the Pradoṣa tāṇḍava he is performing on Kailāsa: "If you wish to dance is there no smooth and shiny stage for you in the celestial world? Are there not devotees who will spread a carpet of flowers for you to dance upon? Leaving it all you are dancing on these rocks with your feet that are soft like flowers. Is it not because you know that I will be born with a rocklike heart that — since you will want to dance in it — you are training yourself by dancing on this mountain terrain?"

Here Parameśvara's marriage is mentioned as "upayamanam". It is with reason that the Ācārya uses a somewhat unfamiliar word. A child is entrusted to a guru so as to bring him under a certain discipline and to lead him on the right path. In the same way, upayamanam means entrusting a girl to her husband to take her on the right path and bring her under discipline.

Now to set an example to all women in the world, Parāśakti herself, during her marriage, receives upayamana from Parameśvara like an ordinary woman. Then, out of his compassion for all mankind — it was true compassion,"dayamānena manasā" — he wanted her also to dance with him in the minds of their children. It was as training for this, so he must have thought, that he placed her foot on the grinding stone.

Meditating on the feet of Ambā is a means of softening our minds, of melting our hearts, which are hard like grinding stones. There is no religion, no philosophical system, greater than this. We must make ourselves children of innocence and place her feet in our minds, in our *hearts*, place them on our head which is the source of our minds, our consciousness. We must do so in our imagination; we must feel with all our heart that her feet are placed on our head. If we are aware that Ambā's feet are on our head, there is nothing else needed to realise the bliss of the Brahman. Ambā placed her feet on a buffalo [Mahiṣāsura] and made him jñāna personified and blessed him with oneness with her. That is why we are enjoined in the *Saptaśati Kalpa* to perform pūjā to the goddess along with Mahiṣāsura.

It is our ego-sense that has us in its grip and causes us so much suffering. The way to eradicate it is meditating on her feet. The celestials were smug in the belief that they had accomplished everything on their own. The Ācārya reminds us of their initial boastfulness, how they were later shorn of their arrogance and of the Upaniṣadic story which mentions how Ambā blessed them with jñāna. It is while reminding us of this story that he uses the term "mamāpi", without any ego or self-pride. It does not matter when we will in fact attain the feet of Ambā. Let us now be her children, perform her pūjā, place on our head one of the flowers offered at the feet of her idol and pray to her for the day when we will have *darshan* of her feet.

Chapter 100

Surrendering at Ambā's Feet

The feet are meant for walking. In poetry heroines are depicted as having the gait of haṁsas[g]. The Ācārya has composed a stanza that expresses an idea different from this. According to it haṁsas wanted to have the same beauty of gait as is Ambā's, and to learn to "walk" like her they kept going from place to place with her. Out of kindness for the birds, Ambā's feet taught them how to walk gracefully by actual "demonstration". Not only that, they taught the birds verbally the "theory" behind the beautiful gait of Ambā. How? Ambā's anklets fitted with bells make the sound of *jal-jal* when she walks. It is this *jal-jal* [the tintinnabulation] that is the "theory" taught to the haṁsas—representing the words constituting the text of the theory. In an earlier stanza (60) the Ācārya said that the *jan-jan* sound made by Ambā's ear-ornaments was her appreciation of Sarasvatī's music. Here the vehicle of Sarasvatī (that is the haṁsa) receives lessons in "walking" gracefully from Ambā's anklets.

Actually, the anklet itself has the name of "haṁsakam". Mūka has made a pun on the word. For some reason the Ācārya has not done the same. Perhaps he "reserved" the idea for Mūka[1]. "Haṁsa" also denotes a sannyāsin. We speak of "Paramahaṁsas", don't we? Perhaps the Ācārya in his large-heartedness left it for Mūka to make a pun on the word...[2]

In the last stanza devoted to the keśādipāda portrayal of Ambā, the Ācārya prays that his sense organs and mind must become absorbed at the feet of Ambā. I have already spoken about it. In the version of the hymn that is more in vogue, this stanza comes before the one in which the Ācārya deals with haṁsas being taught by her anklets to walk like Ambā. But I have seen the version in which the order of the two stanzas is reversed. I feel that a really fitting conclusion to the portrayal of Ambā's body is the stanza which says, "May the bee which is my life and the six legs which are made up of my five sense organs and my mind become interred at your sacred lotus feet": "tava carane nimajjan majjivaḥ karaṇacaraṇaḥ ṣaḍcaraṇatām".

The Ācārya has expressed the idea of the bee and the lotus in his *Subrahmaṇya-Bhujaṅgam* and somewhat differently in his *Śaḍpadī-stotram.*

In the version more in vogue the stanza beginning with the words, "kadā kāle mātah.....", comes in place of the stanza with which the description of Ambā's feet is concluded in the other version. It is in the former ("kādā kāle mātaḥ....") that the Ācārya, regarding himself as a vidyārthin, as a student, asks when the day will come for him to imbibe the sacred water of Ambā's feet and become adept in learning. That a stanza containing this idea occurs in the midst of the verses describing Ambā's feet is also apt. Apart from this, in the more popular version the stanzas dealing with Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī and Ambā do not occur consecutively. The "kadā kāle" stanza provides a break after the first two are spoken of. And it is followed by the third stanza dealing with the goddesses. In the version I am following here the three stanzas come together without a break.

I am not asking you to change the order of the stanzas. It is all right to read the hymn whatever the order of the ślokas.

References

[1] Kavīnām cetovannakhararucisamparki vibudha-
Sravantīsrotovatpatumukharitam haṁsakaravaiḥ
Dinārambhaśrīvanniyatamaruṇacchāyasubhagam
Ṃadantaḥ kāmākṣyāḥ sphuratu padapaṅkeruhayugam
— *Mūka-Pañcaśatī,* Pādāravinda Śatakam, 27

[2] Kirañjyotsnārītim nakhamaṇiruca hamsamanasām
Vitanvānaḥ prītim vikacataruṇāmbhoruharuciḥ
Prakāśaḥ srīpādastava janani kāmākṣi tanute
Śaratkālapraudhīm śaśiśakalacuḍapriyatame
— *Ibid,* 47.

Chapter 101

Even the Lotus is no Match.....

The feet of Ambā are compared to lotuses, but these flowers cannot be a true object of comparison. The sacred feet of Ambā are the sacred feet of Ambā. It is not possible to know their excellence by likening them to anything else. In an earlier stanza (87), the Ācārya shows the different ways in which Ambā's feet are superior to lotuses.

In what different ways? The lotus wilts in the snow : "himānī hantavyam". What about Ambā's sacred feet? "Himagiri-nivāsaika-caturau": they are capable of being in the mountain of snow, that is the Himālaya. The Himālaya is Ambā's home; she was born there; and she was not married in a distant place; the home of the one whom she married is also the Himālaya. Thus her feet will neither wilt nor fade as she walks in the snow. Secondly, the lotus folds or seems to sleep at night; "niśāyām nidrāṇam". The folding of the lotus at night is like one sleeping with one's eyes closed; hence the use of the word "nidrāṇam". Ambā's feet are always on the move, even the whole night, taking the goddess to her devotees whenever it is time to bless them. "Niśi caramabhāge ca viśadau": awake the whole night ablossom. Thirdly, the lotus desires Lakṣmī to reside in it: "varam Lakṣmīpātram" : it thinks it is a matter of pride for it to keep Lakṣmī within its petals. What about the sacred feet of Ambā? "Śriyam atisṛjantau samayinām": they create Lakṣmī for each and every one of those who follow the way of worshipping Ambā called "Samayā". It means they, Amba's sacred feet, grant her devotees good fortune in all respects. The sacred feet confer on Ambā's devotees all auspiciousness, all wealth. If the lotus keeps Lakṣmī within itself, the sacred feet of Ambā pours out Lakṣmī to everyone. "Sarojam tvatpādau janani jayataścitramiha kim": "Mother, your feet triumph over the lotus. What is there to wonder about it?" Ambā's auspicious feet are Ambā's auspicious feet.

Chapter 102

Red has its Glory

All parts of Ambā's body, all the waves of the ocean of beauty that she is, have been described by the Ācārya, in words that confer her blessings on us. Now (in Stanza 92) he deals with the seat which is graced by her entire presence. In this verse he also speaks about the radiance of red emanating together from all parts of her body. In the *Sahasranāmam* we have this in the beginning, "Udyad-bhānu-sahasrābhā" ("one with the effulgence of a thousand rising suns") and then comes the pādādi-keśānta[g] description of Ambā. To be different, the Ācārya first paints a portrait of Ambā's body from the hair on her head to her feet and then describes the lustre of her body as a whole.

I have already spoken about the throne of Ambā. Its legs are made up of four of the pañcakṛtya deities and the fifth serves the purpose of the actual seat; it is indeed an astonishing kind of throne.

The Ācārya speaks about the glory of the red lustre of Ambā seated on it as Rājarājeśvarī. By its impact [of the red lustre] the white-complexioned Śiva turns red as Kāmeśvara. If the two are to remain as Kāmeśvara and Kāmeśvarī, or as Father and Mother, for the purpose of the creation of the world, he (Śiva) has to be a nāyaka of śṛṅgāra or love. The colour of śṛṅgāra is red, so to the eye of Ambā Śiva looks the personification of that rasa or mood. Here we have an integrated view of poetry, metaphysics and the theory of light [poetry, metaphysics and physics].

With Ambā's power Śiva, the supreme yogin, becomes an embodiment of śṛṅgāra. But, turning this idea round, we must understand the same thus : that Ambā can make even one steeped in desire or love a great yogin. To eradicate desire and other passions in us we must go to Kāmākṣī herself for refuge. When the hymn speaks of "evolution", we must fix our minds on its obverse side of involution and we must go to Ambā for refuge to become absorbed within that which was manifested outside. Is not the setting sun also as red as the rising sun? So, as we speak of the śṛṅgāra of the rising sun, we must remind ourselves of the setting sun that signifies samādhi (final absorption).

Red stands for power, the potency of action. White stands for the state of universal absorption, tranquillity. The body acquires a tinge of red when it is well nourished and is robust. When it is malnourished it becomes pale.

Leave aside the redness of love or śṛṅgāra. What we require is the redness of compassion. Indeed śṛṅgāra itself is caused because it becomes necessary to create the world and to look upon the world so created with compassion. What first emerged in the non-dualistic Brahman is the intent or wish of evincing love. It is because there must be people to be loved that the world was created. The embodiment of śṛṅgāra came to be for the creation of the world by Śiva and Śakti as Father and Mother sporting. What is separated from the whiteness of tranquillity is the love that is red. When Śiva and Śakti are husband and wife, their love is called śṛṅgāra. But the love shown towards creation, towards people, all creatures, is compassion. What we need is this compassion.

When fruit or vegetables ripen, whether it is the sweet mango or bitter-gourd, Ambā makes them red. The redness of her compassion must make our minds mature, ripen them and impart redness to them.

You should not think that I have extended the redness of śṛṅgāra to mean the redness of compassion by any intellectual exercise on my part. I have told you what the Ācārya himself says in the next stanza (93) — and he says it with a string of beautiful words: "Jayati karuṇā kācidaruṇā — jagattrātum Śaṁbhoḥ jayati karuṇā kācidaruṇā." "Jagat" = the world; "trātum" = to protect; ''Śambhoḥ" = of Śiva who is still; "karuṇā" = compassion; "kācit." = beyond description; "aruṇa" = becomes Ambā who is red; "jayati" = triumphs, shines victoriously. It is to bless the world [for its well-being] that Śivam who is white and tranquil becomes the power of compassion that is Ambā who is aruṇā (red) and keeps going round the world in triumphant glory.

Here we see Śiva and Śakti as one, as one non-dual entity.

Chapter 103

The Moon—A Vessel for Perfumes

Now it is all śṛṅgāra that the Ācārya deals with. It is customary to offer the wife a cool cup of rosewater with musk, camphor and other scents added to it. In the next stanza (94), the Ācārya gives expression to a novel idea that the moon glittering in the sky is the rosewater cup meant for Ambā. The moon is indeed Ambā's vessel of rosewater. The blemish on it is the musk in the rosewater. When we say that the moon waxes day by day it means parings of camphor are added to it. As Ambā keeps using the camphor day after day Brahmā keeps replenishing the same. The Ācārya has given us such an unusual imagery.

What is the reason behind this unique metaphor? Brahmā it was who was chiefly pleased with the marriage of Śiva and Pāravatī. That is why temple festivals which include the marriage of divine couples are called "Brahmotsvas". Since Parameśvara and Pārvatī are referred to as a dampati here, as a husband-and-wife pair, it occurs to the Ācārya, as he is about to conclude the hymn, that he must bring in Brahmā somehow. Apart from that, did he not in the opening stanzas refer to Ambā as "Candraśekharī"? After all she herself resides in the Candramaṇḍala (the circle or realm of the moon). Her association with the moon is more than with anything else. That being so, the Ācārya must have thought that it would not be proper to stop with calling her "aruṇā" as he does in the previous stanza, "Aruṇa" being the name of the sun's charioteer. So he composes an entire stanza in which he deals with the moon. That is why he creates the image of the moon being the cup of her perfumes. A sumangalī[g] is called "suvāsinī." The Ācārya here elevates the moon by calling him Ambā's "vāsanā-bhāṇḍa" (vessel of perfumes). For her the moon is nothing more than a little scent box. So the Ācārya makes us wonder how big she herself must be.

Chapter 104

The Ācārya Cautions Us...

The Ācārya is anxious, more anxious than a mother is about her children's conduct, that people should not turn their minds to the wrong path. He is worried, so it seems, that since he has dealt with śṛṅgāra they should not understand the passages concerned in any perverse manner and be tempted to commit wrongs.

Another worry of his is this: Those who are conversant with the śāstras note that great caution is needed in the worship of the Śrīcakra; indeed they seem to instil fear in the minds of devotees about this. The Ācārya has himself depicted Ambā as being at the centre of the Śrīcakra, seated on the Pañcabrahmāsana, and sporting with her husband in śṛṅgāra and at the same time being compassionate to all of us. Because of this, it seems, the Ācārya is worried that people might start worshipping the Śrīcakra without any fear about the adverse consequences of not observing the rules pertaining to it. He is also concerned about the possibility that they might think that they can worship Father and Mother in any manner they like, by taking the easy path. Of course Mother and Father [Ambā and Śiva so regarded] can be worshipped without any strict rules if we are truly moved by love for them. But it must be worship without any yantras [like the Śrīcakra] and without chanting any mantras to invoke the deities worshipped. You may keep a portrait of Ambā, offer a few flowers, chant her names, sing her praises and so on. However, in such worship there may not be true love for the goddess springing in our hearts. Also since we do not wish to perform pūjā to her according to the rules laid down in the śāstras, we may merely pretend that we love her or we may be devoted to her only superficially. In this there may not be any inner realisation of the true meaning of love for Ambā. There can be no Śrīyantra pūjā when we are not bound to a system or discipline, when we do not adhere to the rules pertaining to it. "Na śreyo niyamam vinā.'' [There is no well-being, no prosperity, without adherence to a certain discipline.] Not only that, if we go wrong in following the rules, the consequences can be unfortunate.

The Ācārya is anxious that people should not practise yantra worship foolhardily in this manner and suffer for that reason. He has now come to the concluding stage of his hymn. But, before stating the rewards to be gained by worshipping Ambā in the proper manner, he wishes to issue a warning about the ill consequences of improper worship of the goddess. There are two ways in which we are likely to go wrong. In the first section of the hymn importance is given to the worship of yantras. The first way in which people are likely to go wrong is to take up yantra worship without giving due importance to the discipline necessary for it. In the second section the relationship of the divine couple (Ambā and Īśvara) is dealt with. To regard this as part of a work of fiction or movie entertainment is like going for a bath and returning smeared with slush. This is the second way in which people can go wrong. During the time of the Ācārya people must have had the right approach to the worship of Ambā. Even so the Ācārya has, with a great sense of responsibility, felt it necessary to warn devotees against the wrong approach.

These are evil times. Things have become loosened; that is there is no disciplined approach to anything and there is a tendency to interpret anything and everything according to one's whims. But even today, at least in this matter, the majority of people who religiously read the hymn do so with a pure heart. However, I can say only "the majority of people" and am hesitant to say "all people." Apart from those who read the hymn out of devotion, there are others who read it either out of curiosity or for purposes of research. And some treat it as a literary work, and yet some others go through it for finding mistakes in it. This hymn is meant to be read by devotees with a highly disciplined mind. It is necessary to make people aware of this: whether it is to take delight in the relationship between the divine couple [as portrayed in the hymn] or to commence worship of the yantra, the devotees must have their senses controlled, indeed eradicated. This the Ācārya has done at the very time he composed the hymn [that is he has included his warning in the hymn itself].

Today it seems the number of authors, who are not concerned about whether their writing incites the baser instincts of readers or who actually intend to arouse such instincts with their writing, is on the increase. The sad fact is that they even justify such type of work of theirs.

I am told that they insist that authors must write like them. Perhaps they do so because they do not realise that the sin they commit by goading people into wrong-doing is greater than the sin people commit under the influence of their writing. As for the Ācārya, he is aware of his responsibility as an author and he concludes his work by speaking about the need for the right outlook and approach on the part of the reader.

Mental discipline and control of the senses are difficult to achieve fully. But only such people as those who have accomplished the same must read the hymn. Those qualified for yantra worship may be small in number — one in a hundred thousand. Only such as those who endeavour to have control of their senses or who intensely pray for the same may attempt to be initiated into the hymn. At least during the time they read the hymn or during the time they perform pūjā, devotees must observe the necessary discipline and rules.

The Ācārya is filled with bliss as he depicts Ambā in passages of great beauty. As he is about to finish his portrayal, how can he suddenly change the course taken by his poetic imagination for the sake of issuing a warning [to people against reading the hymn or performing pūjā to Ambā without the right approach]? When a vehicle is being driven on the royal path and when it is time for the passengers to alight on reaching their destination, how can a sudden brake be applied to it, thereby causing hurt to them? So the Ācārya stops the vehicle that is his poetic work comfortably, without any jerk, and makes known his warning unobtrusively. He does not even say facing us: "Perform your worship with mental discipline." Instead he directs his words towards Ambā and refers to the attitude of the people who approach her without a disciplined mind. It is as a mere suggestion that he conveys his warning against any wrong approach to the hymn and to the worship of Ambā (Stanza 95).

Śiva burnt down the three cities. Ambā it is who gives him happiness in the inner apartments (antaḥ-pura). Addressing Ambā, the Tripurasundarī, the Ācārya says: "Purārāterantaḥ-puramasi". "You are the nāyakī, the heroine, of the inner apartments. But it is wrong to think of you in the flesh and blood form and as one inspiring the erotic sentiment. One must think of you only after having controlled one's senses.'' "Tvaccaraṇayoḥ saparyā-maryādā taralakaraṇānām asulabhā":

"The right way of performing pūjā to your feet is not easy for those whose senses are wavering."

The Ācārya says that "it is because they have not controlled their senses that celestials like Indra are far removed from the inner apartments of Ambā, indeed many crores of yojanas away." (A yojana is about nine miles.) Ambā resides with her husband at the centre of the ninth āvaraṇa of the Navāvaraṇa cakra (Śrīcakra). That āvaraṇa is called "Sarvānandamayā." From that the first āvaraṇa is many crores of yojanas away. It is the outer compound of Ambā's capital: it is not one compound but made up of three square compounds. In the first compound, that is the furthest, reside the siddhis like aṇimā, mahimā, etc, in the form of deities. In all the nine āvaraṇas there are many deities and each of them is an "official" subservient to Ambā, the queen-empress, and they grant blessings of one kind or another to devotees.

Even those who pray for the blessing of liberation granted by Ambā perform navāvaraṇa pūjā and adore all members of the great family of deities of the āvaraṇas so as to find delight in the sport of creation of Ambā, in the cosmic drama enacted by her in the sport that embraces countless phenomena that know no boundaries. In this there is a mingling of the rasa of devotion and the rasa of drama. But such devotion and drama do not mean that it is all "easy-going", that the worship of the goddess is an easy matter. The devotees adhere to a very strict regimen in their pūjā, in the chanting of mantras—and there is the sport of dharma, the sport of law in all this.

If you give a party to the president you have to invite the minsters, M.P.s, officers, the president's P.A., his chauffeur, his guard and so on. Each member of this entourage can do us some good, some service. The president has given them the necessary authority. But those who know him need not serve his ministers or members of his entourage. Even so when a party is given, all of them will have to be invited as a matter of courtesy, since they represent the system presided over by him. That is how those who have totally surrendered to Ambā perform pūjā to the deities around her in the order in which they are present in the navāvaraṇas.

There are people who do not approach the president himself for a favour. They seek the help of a minister or an M.P., may be, for a licence to start a business or for admission of their children to a college or some other institution. To keep a goon at bay they may ask for the help of the president's guard. All such — the minister, the president's guard and so on — have only limited authority. The president it is who is vested with all authority. You may take it that I have in mind one like the American president. The authority in the political or administrative set-up decreases as we go down from the president to his guard. Even among the general public people can keep contact with one "circle" or another of authority only according to their own status. If some cannot keep such contact with "circles" above that of the president's guard it means they belong to the lowest stratum of society.

In this manner, on the outer limits of the navāvaraṇa, are the female guard, "watchwomen", who are the siddhis like aṇimā, mahimā and so on personified. After all, the sovereign power is represented by a lady, so her entourage is naturally full of female deities. You must have heard of the "aṣṭa-mahāsiddhis" which are miraculous powers, powers that cannot be explained by the laws of nature. The first of them is "aṇimā" : one who has it can reduce himself to an atom. To grow into a prodigious size one must have the siddhi of "mahimā." Thus there are eight powers or siddhis. Two more have been added to these and so in all there are ten siddhis all of which in their personfied form are in the outer compound of the navāvaraṇa.

Who are the ones that come begging to these deities for favours, the ones that do not have the status to go beyond them? "Śatamakhamukhāḥ", Indra and others who have performed a hundred sacrifices.

Indra received instruction from Ambā herself and became a jñānin. Earlier the Ācārya had said that he (Indra) had gone with Subrahmaṇya and Mahāviṣṇu for the remnants of the betels taken by Ambā, but now he speaks of him thus. Why does Indra have to seek the favour of the female guard and why does the Ācārya say that he does not have the status necessary to go beyond the outer compound of the āvaraṇa?

The Ācārya does not say anything wrong. From the first creation up till now there has not been the same Indra. There have been countless Indras. During one kalpa (it is one thousand caturyugas of ours, Kṛta, Treta, Dvāpara and Kali forming one caturyuga and one daytime of

Brahmā) fourteen Manus appear on earth and each found a royal dynasty. One Manu's lifetime is called a "manvantara." When a new Manu appears a new Indra comes up in the celestial world. Only one who has performed a hundred horse sacrifices is qualified to become an Indra. So from the time of creation until today, during the many manvantaras, there must have been many, many, Indras. It must have been one of these Indras among them who was imparted jñāna by Ambā and who had also received the remnants of Amba's betels. We may regard him as an exceptional Indra. Generally Indras keep waiting before the gatekeepers of the navāvaraṇa. It is because of the fact mentioned by the Ācārya: "taralakaraṇānam asulabhā.": Amba is not accessible to those of wavering minds, to those who have not controlled their minds and senses. In the celestial world which is the world of pleasure, of sensual enjoyment, the denizens are ever youthful and their minds are constantly drawn towards sensual gratification. So they have to keep waiting outside the walls of Ambā's fortress.

We speak of "Indrajāla." One who performs amazing feats, one who demonstrates powers that seem miraculous, is like Indra. But in actual fact Indra is an unwise person. Though he is the king of the celestial world he has to keep waiting outside the palace of Ambā since he has not curbed his senses.

The president wears the same dress as the common people. It is the *durvan*, the gatekeeper or watchman, who is flamboyantly dressed, with his badges, turban and so on. Here, in the navāvaraṇa, the siddhis personified in female form, who are gatekeepers, are like them who outwardly perform miraculous feats. But there is nothing in such displays that contributes to one's spiritual advancement, not even something as tiny as a sesame seed for our inner well-being. One is, on the contrary, likely to become engrossed in, or misled by, such miraculous acts, so much so one may even be prevented from turning to the inward quest. The gatekeepers will teach these feats to those who worship them. These little deities can be worshipped by anybody. All the mantras, tantras, bali and so on that pertain to matters outward can be part of the worship that anyone can take to: inward things like control of the senses, purity of consciousness are not needed for the same. So Indra and other celestials worship these siddhis personified and obtain the miraculous powers granted by them. The Ācārya mentions "siddhim atulām", meaning "incomparable siddhis". The term suggests he is speaking in praise of them. But these siddhis do not help a bit in taking one to the presence of Ambā. The Ācārya suggests this obliquely when he says: "Tava dvaropāntasthitibhiḥ aṇimādyābhiḥ nītāḥ" : "after all they obtain these incomparable powers ('siddhim atulām') from siddhis like 'aṇimā' who guard your (Ambā's) outer gates." We must note that the Ācārya uses the term "atulām siddhim" with irony, mockingly.

The Ācārya gives a third warning here, again in a veiled manner. It is that one must not be ensnared by the siddhis. Siddhis like aṇimā are granted by the gatekeepers of the navāvaraṇa who are far, far, away from Ambā. In this statement there is a suggestion of how difficult it is to reach her [that is there is an immense distance between obtaining miraculous powers and going to the presence of the goddess]. The Ācārya, by implication, exhorts us not to be misled by the siddhis. He seems to ask, "Do you desire nothing more than receiving charity from the maidservants of a household?"

There have been great men called siddhas in the past. Even today there are a few, though the majority are charlatans. The true siddhas are those who have controlled their senses and they do not perform their feats for any selfish purpose. If they perform miracles it is out of compassion and to help suffering people. They demonstrate their siddhis also to reveal the power of God. What they reveal are not all of them within human reason or comprehension. There are many things beyond human reason and beyond the ken of science. What the true siddhas do cannot be a reason for ordinary people, who have no control over their senses, to feel that they have a licence to attempt the same.

Those who have no control over their minds cannot comprehend the philosophical truth behind the idea of Śiva and Śakti as husband and wife. Even when reading the hymn, treating it as a poetic work with its descriptions of the Śiva-Śakti couple, one must not be forgetful of the fact that we must have control over our minds. Celestials like Indra wait outside the capital of Ambā which is in the form of a cakra: it shows that only those who truly desire mental discipline can perform Śrīcakra pūjā. If there is the will for mental discipline one will be inclined to adhere strictly to the rules and restrictions pertaining to the pūjā. So Śrīyantra pūjā truly involves two kinds of discipline—mental discipline and the discipline to be observed in the performance of the pūjā itself.

In this stanza (95), the Ācārya gives his warning in respect of Śrīcakra pūjā, but he does so gently and with circumspection, without expressly stating anything that would create fear in us about the untoward consequences of yantra worship performed without inward discipline and without adhering to the rules pertaining to the same.

Chapter 105

Ambikā's Amazing Pātivratya

Having dealt with the need for mental purity in regarding descriptions of the divine couple and confident that readers would have it at least for brief moments, the Ācārya proceeds to compose three stanzas in which he deals with the Trimūrti, each member of the Triad with his consort forming a daṁpati[g]. And he does so with all his gifts as a mahākavi.

In one of these stanzas (96) he says that great poets are customarily called "Sarasvatī-vallabhas". Strictly speaking, according to the śāstras, Brahmā alone is the vallabha[1] of Sarasvatī. Similarly, Mahāviṣṇu alone is the lord of Śrī or Lakṣmī. But big personages, wealthy people, are often called "Śrīmān", *"Selva Śīmān"* (in Tamiḷ). In this manner is there anywhere the custom of Ambā being associated with mortals? Or any saying expressing such a sentiment? No. As Parameśvara's wife and a great pativratā[g] she is Mother to all men and she is not referred to, under any pretext, in the same way as Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī are.

The Ācārya mentions something that adds an extra dimension to Ambā's pātivratya. During pregnancy women suffer from what is called "dohada" or morning sickness. Plants too experience dohada and they flower and fruit only after their desire is satisfied. There is a list of such plants, trees, creepers in the poetic tradition: it contains the kind of dohada a particular plant has and how it is satisfied. All these kinds of dohada in the vegetable kingdom, or the ways in which they are satisfied, are associated with women. There is a plant which flowers as the kaṭākṣa of a woman falls on it.[2] There is another which bursts into flower when a woman in love laughs.[3] A third plant flowers as a woman dances[4] and a fourth brings forth flowers if she is seated on a swing[5]. Another tree flowers if a woman blows on it with her mouth.[6] Mention is made of a tree which flowers as a woman fills her mouth with wine and discharges it on it in a jet[7]. Then there is a tree which flowers if a woman kicks it. The plant called "kuravaka" [*marudāṅi* or *marudonri* in Tamiḷ, *mehndi* in Hindi] flowers when it is embraced by a woman. The

Ācārya says that Ambā who has offered herself totally to Parameśvara, dedicated to him her mind, speech and body, does not satisfy the dohada even of this kuravaka shrub.

Here, as he invokes Ambā, the Ācārya calls her, "Sati, satīnām acarame". The "Satī" first mentioned is the name of Ambā alone. It was the name by which she was known as the daughter of Dakṣa Prajāpati. "Sat" yields two meanings, "truth" and "good". "Satī" thus is the name of the incarnation of Brahma-Śakti, the incarnation or embodiment of the Supreme Truth and the Great Good. Ambā brought to an end that avatāra of hers because of her unparalleled pātivratya. Her husband was ignored, slighted, by her father, so feeling wounded she took an aversion for her body which had been given her by her father and sacrificed herself. Since then the word "satī" has become a synonym for a pativratā. "Satī", the proper noun, is now also a common noun for all noble wives. "Satīnām acarame": here it is as a common noun that the Ācārya uses the word satī: the term means "occupying the first place among satīs". You must have come across the phrase "carama śloka". It is the verse recited in praise of a departed person. "Carama" means end. "Acarama" means the first.

Śiva is of no use for anything. It is Ambā who makes him useful — it is thus that the Ācārya begins his hymn. It is the Śākta system that makes him speak thus. The poetic tradition also supports such a view. However, is it not the "final word" that is the verdict? When the Ācārya gives his verdict thus, he speaks in his capacity of a dharmācārya, in accordance with the Vedas and śāstras and from the point of view of what is beneficial to people in worldly life. It is thus that he gives the first place to Īśvara and shows Ambā as a gem among patrivratās, as one who surrenders to him, regarding him as her all. The next stanza (97) takes us to the pinnacle of this idea.

Notes & References

[1] According to Āpte's Sanskrit dictionary "vallabha" means the beloved, the dear one, husband, "chief herdsman",

[2] Sesame.

[3] Mandāra,

[4] Karṇikara, *Erythrina indica.*

[5] Nameru

[6] Mango

[7] *Makizha* tree

[8] Aśoka, *Sarasa indica.*

Chapter 106

Chief Queen of the Parabrahman

Girāmāhurdevīm Druhiṇagṛhiṇīm āgamavido
Hareḥ patnīm Padmām Harasahacarīm Adritanayām
Turīyā kāpi tvam duradhigamanissīma-mahimā
Mahāmāyā viśvam bhramayasi Parabrahmamahiṣī

The Ācārya gives here (Stanza 97) an extraordinary name for Ambā, "Parabrahmamahiṣī". According to the Śākta system Parāśakti is supreme; she is above all. In fact in our hymn this idea has been expressed all along. Parāśakti is the one with authority to rule; she is the sovereign power. I have told you so often that she has Kāmeśvara for her husband. The world needs a Mother and Father pair : hence Kāmeśvari and Kāmeśvara. But what is the meaning of "Parabrahmamahiṣī"? To explain the meaning in some detail: The ruling monarch is Īśvara as the Parabrahman. Ambā, as queen and wife, occupies the second place. "Mahiṣī" means the chief queen of the king. A queen who reigns and rules in her own right is not called "mahiṣī" but "mahārājñī" or "cakravartinī". Like the pairs, rāja-rājñi", and "cakravartin-cakravartinī", we do not have "mahiṣa-mahiṣī", which means the king is not called "mahiṣa". "Mahiṣa" is the name of a demon; one who is like a buffalo is a mahiṣa. The queen, submissive to the rājā, has the special name of mahiṣī. The word has no masculine gender in the sense of a ruler.

Ambā has all along been referred to as the one who activates Śiva, as the one who keeps him under her sway and as the one who protects him from perishing. After having said all this in Ambā's glory, as he is about to conclude his hymn, the Ācārya, who is concerned about strīdharma[g], crowns Śiva as king-emperor and makes Ambā his mahiṣī. She herself likes such a position. It is she who inspires the Ācārya to give expression to such an idea.

The stanza concludes with the word "Parabrahmamahiṣī.'' I have already dealt with it. What does the Ācārya state before this? He speaks of Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī and Pārvatī as the wives of (Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva respectively) the Trimūrti. Then only does he come to the fourth, Kāmeśvari, that is Parāśakti, the root of all and the wife of the Turīya Brahman.

In the previous stanza the Ācārya says, addressing Ambā: "There are many who are 'Sarasvatī-vallabhas' and 'Śrīmāns'. But your name cannot be linked in similar manner to others. You remain the wife of Śiva and a great pativratā.'' The reference to the other two goddesses (Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī) seems to be derogatory to them. That it is not so, he clarifies in this stanza. Do you think the Master of Advaita would ever speak differentiating between the various deities? To elevate the deity that is being extolled and involve the minds of people deeply in him or in her, other deities may be said to be inferior to the one extolled. It is thus that the Ācārya speaks of other deities (deities other than Ambā). The same Ācārya, we must remember, was specially devoted to Sarasvatī. He established the Śāradā Maṭha, the Śāradā Pīṭha and, in Śṛṅgeri, he gave particular importance to Śāradāṁbā. Sannyāsins are divided into ten groups, "daśanāmī". For two groups the Ācārya has given the names of Sarasvatī and Bhāratī -- the second name also means Sarasvatī. The names of no other deity is given to any of the other daśañamī groups. It must also be noted that the most remarkable of the hymns to Lakṣmī is the "Kanakadhārāstavam" composed by the Ācārya. In fact this was the very first hymn that came from his lips.

The Ācārya makes it clear at the outset itself that there are no differences, or that no distinctions are to be made, among the gods (and goddesses). Addressing Ambā, he says: "You are indeed spoken of as Vagīśvarī, Brahmā's wife, and Mother Padmāvatī, Viṣṇu's wife": Girāmāhuḥ devīm Druhiṇagṛhiṇīm... Hareḥ patnīm Padmām." This is not something that he says on his own: he says in all humility that he is echoing what the Vedas themselves say, that there are no differences or distinctions among the deities. "The learned men who know the Vedas speak so," "Āgamavidaḥ."

He then adds: "Harasahacarīm Adritanayām" "You are indeed the wife of Rudra, Pārvatī." "Adritanayā" means Pārvatī, daughter of the mountain.

I have mentioned that, in addition to the Trimūrti, there are a number of other deities too for the pañcakṛtya, that Rudra and Pārvatī are part of the Trimūrti family, that Kāmeśvara and Kāmeśvarī are seated on the top of those who perform the pañcakṛtya functions. So the wife of one of the Trimūrti, Pārvatī, that is the power behind Rudra the destroyer, is, like Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī, separate from Kāmeśvarī, the Parāśakti, and also inferior in status to the latter. However, speaking from the non-dualistic point of view, the Ācārya observes that, like Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī, Pārvatī too is Parāśakti. There is none, nothing, other than Parāśakti; the idea is that it is she that has taken the form of everybody and everything.

This takes the Ācārya to the non-dualistic concept of turīya. Pañcakṛtya includes five functions. Apart from these or above them, according to the Śaiva and Śākta systems, are the fundamental Reality and its Śakti. But this is not the view of Advaita which speaks only of four states. In the *Māṇḍūkyopaniṣad,* which means Vedic authority, this is stated clearly. An individual has the states of svapnāvasthā (dream state) which corresponds to sṛṣṭi or creation, jāgratāvasthā (wakeful state) which corresponds to sthiti or sustenance and suṣupti (sleep) which corresponds to saṃhāra or dissolution. In suṣupti, the root or source of life, the Brahman, is ever wakeful: it is the caturtha or the fourth state. That completes the number of states, according to the *Māṇḍūkyopaniṣad*. It is caturtha that is called turīya. On the basis of what is said above, the Ācārya, after mentioning the śaktis of creation, sustenance and dissolution, does not deal with tirodhāna (veiling) and anugraha (bestowing grace), the remaining two of the pañcakṛtya concept but goes to the Brahman that is turīya. He does not say anything specially in his exposition of Advaita of the Śakti of the Parabrahman. I have used the word "specially" because, as some people believe, he has not completely overlooked it. I have spoken about the subject earlier. In his commentary on the first sūtra of the *Brahmasūtra*, the Ācārya deals with the characteristics of the Brahman. He says that it is "nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta-svabhāva" and adds that when we say that It is "sarvajña", that it knows all, it means that this "Ekam", this One, has others, "sarvam" that are different, and that It knows all of them. Then, more explicitly, the Ācārya gives a lakṣaṇa or trait, "sarva-śakti-samanvitam". In his commentary on the sūtra, "Sarvabheda ca tatdarśanāt" (11.1.30), he accepts the dualistic state and observes that the Brahman is "vicitraśaktiyogam", that It has many kinds of power. In the language of the Śākta system it is mentioned here, in the hymn, that the Brahman has Parāśakti as its mahiṣi.

Among the greatest teachers of non-dualism was Sarvajñātman who was one of the Ācārya's direct and important disciples. He observes: ''In the philosophy of pure Advaita there is neither śakti, nor līlā, nor sṛṣṭi. However, when those who have faith and have Advaita as their ultimate goal see things from the angle of the empirical world with their karma, worship and so on, it is explained that the consciousness that is the jñāna of the Brahman takes the nature of Śakti and creates the world with the insentient Śakti that is called Avidyā or Māyā.'' But the mind must not be turned to the doings of Śakti but to the quiescent Brahman and sought to be united with It, this being the goal of the Ācārya as expounded in his Advaitik texts. So Brahma-Sakti is not given importance in this view and creation is dismissed as nothing more than Māyā. One is asked to involve one's consciousness in the turīya Brahman. The Ācārya does not speak much about Śakti, not even as energy without any gender; so there is no room to regard it as a woman, as Brahma-Śakti.

It is the same Ācārya that taught Brahmavidyā who is seen here as a preceptor of Śrīvidyā. While showing the path to those who are attached to the doctrine of Śrīvidyā or are involved in it, he says that Parāśakti, that is Kāmeśvarī herself is the wife of the Parabrahman, the mahiṣī of the Parabrahman. Śrīvidyā tantra also has the goal of non-dualistic union with the Brahman. The Ācārya in this hymn integrates two views or two principles: the turīya of the non-dualistic path and the concept of the Śiva-Śakti couple that is part of Śākta devotion.

When the Ācārya refers to Ambā as "Turīyā", not only does it mean that she is the fourth, the one that is beyond the three, Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī and Pārvatī, that is Parāśakti who is at the root of all, but also that she is Turīyā in the sense that she is the power and the spouse of the Brahman who is Turīya.

"O Ambikā, you are the paṭṭamahiṣī of the Parabrahman. You make the entire cosmos whirl in the dualistic pull as Mahāmāyā," says the Ācārya. He thus reconciles Advaita Vedānta with the Śākta system by identifying Parāśakti with the Mahāmāyā that finds such prominent mention in Advaita. As he praises that Māyā as "duradhigama-nissīma-mahimā", he uses such language as in which Śakti is praised in the Śākta system. "Duradhigamam" means "unobtainable": It also means one whose command cannot be transgressed by anyone. "Nissīma mahimā"= glory that has no limits, boundless glory. In Advaita, Māyā is dismissed as something petty, an enigma that cannot be comprehended. Here the same Māyā is celebrated as Parāśakti. Countless are the types of creatures that Ambā has created and among them humans too belong to manifold types. Our Bhagavatpāda is an incomparable teacher and he imparts instruction to people in accordance with their states of mind and in such a way as to help them in their inward advancement. The one who has shown many paths for realisation has revealed himself as an ācārya of the Śrīvidyā system which is very close to Advaita. He has taken elements from Śrīvidyā tantra and from Advaita, elements that can naturally mingle together, and given us a system combining the two. It is like the delicacy produced by mixing milk and sugar and reducing the same under heat into a doughlike confection.

According to the Ācārya's Advaitik concept, the Nirguṇa Brahman has no connection with Māyā. In order to take people practising devotion according to Śākta beliefs, he makes the Parabrahman and Mahāmāyā husband and wife. Not only that, he does not forget, the world teacher that he is, the śāstras and dharma that are very far from Advaita — he does not forget that these śāstras and dharma are to be followed in the workaday world. He does not merely speak of the husband and wife relationship: he makes the wife subservient to the husband. So the Brahman is king-emperor and Parāśakti is his queen or mahiṣī.

How broad-minded was the Ācārya? If we see how he had an open mind which was receptive to everything, every idea, and how he was able to be a guide to everyone and how he harmonized various views without fanatically clinging to one, when we think of all this, we feel proud that we had an ācārya like him.

In the opening stanza of his hymn, the Ācārya says that Parāśakti activates the quiescent Śiva. As he concludes, he says that she keeps the entire cosmos in a whirl, "viśvam bhramayasi". As the Śivabrahman is activated, as it starts revolving, creation occurs, and everything is set in motion, everything starts revolving. An electron in an atom revolves

186,000 miles a second (round the proton). Not only electrons but planets like the earth, stars, constellations, galaxies keep rotating on their axes and keep moving in the pathways in space. Parāśakti keeps everything moving with a power that cannot be imagined by us, that cannot be comprehended by us. With all these movements taken together the mind of an individual keeps roaming. The Ācārya has rightly said of Parāśakti: "Viśvam bhramayasi." The Lord too says in the Gītā, "Bhramayan sarva bhūtāni"[1], but the reference here is to the living kingdom. All of us have "cittabhrama", unsteadiness of mind or consciousness — the Lord refers to it. He says that Īśvara dwelling in the minds of people keeps them under his sway, keeps them in motion. The Ācārya's statement embraces all, the sentient and the insentient.

The one who keeps us under her sway as Mahāmāyā is also the embodiment of supreme grace, the one who grants us every type of blessing in this world of Māyā itself. But, in the end, she will make us the embodiment of the supreme bliss that is Śivam, make us the Brahman, make us still and quiescent. This is the message of the next stanza[2].

References

[1] Iśvaraḥ sarva-bhūtānām hṛd-deśe Arjuna tiṣṭhati
Bhrāmayan sarva-bhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā
— *Bhagavadgita,* 18.61

Although "bhūtāni" include sentient beings and insentient objects, since the heart is mentioned, we must take the word to refer to living beings.

[2] The stanza beginning with the words "Kadā kāle" is the next verse according to the more popular version. What the Mahāguru refers to is the one next to it.

Chapter 107

Mother Worship and its Rewards

While concluding a hymn it is customary to include in it a "phalaśruti", an account of the "fruits" to be obtained by reciting it. The Ācārya was an embodiment of humility. He says at the end that he did not compose the hymn by himself, that it was the grace of Ambā that inspired him to do it. This is what he says in the one hundredth stanza. The phalaśruti seems to be contained in the previous stanza. No, even in it there is no phalaśruti in the real sense but something akin to it. The Ācārya realises that, though it was Ambā who made him compose the hymn, the world would know him as its author. So he feels that if he were to mention the benefits yielded by his hymn it would be tantamount to his being boastful about the potency of his own work. Such is his humility. So, instead of speaking about the rewards to be obtained by reciting his hymn, he speaks about the blessings to be received by worshipping Ambā. After all, his stotra is meant to take devotees to the feet of Ambā. Instead of saying, "by reading this hymn you will derive such and such benefits", he says later "the one who worships you [Ambā] ('tvadbhajanavān') obtains these rewards" [Stanza 99].

If you examine the stanza closely you will realise that reading this hymn itself is to adore Ambā, to worship her. It is doubtful whether pūjā, japa, meditation and so on would help you become enchanted by her as would reading the hymn. If remaining enchanted by her is not upāsanā, worship, what else is?

Another thing. The first section of the hymn represents the mantra and tantra pertaining to her; it embodies her through mantra and tantra. The second section is a portrayal of her beauty. Thus the hymn itself is Ambā. Reading it therefore is worshipping Ambā, her bhajana, is it not so? One is compelled to ask a counter-question: "What are the blessings that you will *not* receive by worshipping her?" Ambā grants us all the blessings of this world and the next. Leave aside the belief that well-being in the next world is true well-being, that well-being here is no well-being at all. Let great men, jñānins, keep speaking so. Let it (well-being in the next world) be our ultimate goal. Are we mature enough to reject the rewards of this world as unwanted? Can we obtain the wisdom needed for this purpose by reciting a magic spell? So let us proceed to the next world from this, step by step, with faith in Ambā. Guarding ourselves against becoming more and more ensnared in this world, let us progress gradually so as to be freed from it. A tender mango is bitter to taste, then in its second stage it becomes astringent, in the third stage sour and in the final stage, when it is mellow and sweet, it drops to earth. So like that, stage by stage, going along with nature and in keeping with the laws of this world itself, let us become free from it (from this world) like a ripe mango getting detached from the tree. After all, the drama of this world is the work of Ambā. Will she allow us to escape from it with ease?

It is in such a stage that we are encouraged by the promise of rewards in this world and the next. The Ācārya himself enthuses us to take such a view. Were he to say that the blessings granted by Ambā are meant only for the next world, that she grants liberation (that she is "mokṣapradāyinī" alone) no one would be inclined to worship her.

All rewards of worship, rewards pertaining to this world, are under four heads: Learning or knowledge, aiśvarya (that is affluence, prosperity), good looks, and a long life. Knowledge or learning also pertains to the next world, and is related to the ultimate purpose, that is liberation. To advance in this world also one needs to have knowledge.

Knowledge is derived from education. So the Ācārya speaks associating it with Sarasvatī who is the dispenser of vidyā. Actually, it is Ambā alone who is the one who gives us all that is good, not Sarasvatī and others. We are now concerned with the worship of Ambā, are we not? So Ambā herself, we must believe, imparts us the knowledge that Sarasvatī grants us. And to what extent? To the extent that will arouse the envy of Brahmā himself: Ambā pours out knowledge in abundance to you. Why is Brahmā dragged in here? One who possesses the vilāsa[g] [blessing] of Sarasvatī fully must naturally be Brahmā, her husband. To keep chanting the four Vedas as he does with his four mouths means that there cannot be "Sarasvatī vilāsa" greater than it? But the fact is Ambā bestows on her devotee learning even greater than this. That is why Brahmā envies him his learning thinking, "This person has my wife's vilāsa more than I have it."

Next is aiśvarya: prosperity, money, property and so on.

Although the Ācārya has mentioned this next to learning, left to our own choice, we would ask for aiśvarya first. What we desire most is prosperity, then only would we want knowledge, if at all. If the Lord were to appear before people and tell them that he would grant any wish of theirs, the majority would opt for money. The desire for it is insatiable.

Learning, material prosperity and looks: we desire all three but we would give first preference to prosperity. There is something interesting about all this [bearing upon the human way of thinking]. We always think ourselves to be learned, though by trying to show that we are learned we make ourselves ridiculous. The fact is neither do we have a thirst for knowledge nor do we make any effort to acquire learning. All our thirst is for money, all our efforts are to make it or amass it somehow. Similarly, we imagine ourselves to be good-looking and we want the world also to think that we are handsome. While we do not make any effort to acquire learning, it is different with our desire to be good-looking. We try to beautify ourselves, adorn ourselves, in various ways, thereby we earn the scorn of others. But in the matter of prosperity it is different. We do never think that we are affluent. Even if we have a crore of rupees we do not admit that, "We have enough money. We do not want any more." We are averse to show ourselves as prosperous to the outside world. However wealthy we are we pretend that we own nothing. Indeed we keep speaking sadly to others about our indigence. All told, prosperity is our first preference.

As for the Ācārya, he mentions knowledge as the first choice and then only prosperity. However much he is prepared to go along with us and speak of the benefits to be gained in this life from worshipping Ambā, he is reluctant to relegate knowledge or learning to an inferior place. Apart from the fact that he is concerned about what is good for us, his thinking must be on these lines: "If people are made prosperous without first being given the boon of knowledge, will they not use it (their prosperity) in ways that do harm to the Self? Whatever be their own first preference, we for our part must mention knowledge as a reward to be gained before all else. If they are given knowledge first they will use their wealth for dhārmik purposes and make it a means for spiritual advancement.'' It is thus that the Ācārya first mentions Sarasvatī vilāsa and then Lakṣmī vilāsa: Lakṣmī is the presiding deity of wealth. In the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* it is "medhā'' (intelligence, learning) that is first prayed for and then Śrī (1.4.1 & 2). Commenting on this the Ācārya says: "Amedhāso hi Śrīḥ anarthāya eva ca.'' (The Upaniṣad says so because it is dangerous to give money to one without intelligence or learning.) In his "*Bhaja Govindam*" hymn, the Ācārya exhorts us to keep in mind always that wealth or "artha'' is indeed "anartha'', *i.e.* full of danger.

If Sarasvatī vilāsa is full in Brahmā, Lakṣmī vilāsa is full in Viṣṇu. That is why Viṣṇu, wearing a crown, ear-ornaments, the jewel Kaustubha, yellow-coloured silk and so on, holds court in Vaikuṇṭha as its emperor. But if a man adores Ambā he becomes so prosperous as to excel the splendour of even Viṣṇu. Envying him Viṣṇu would say: "My wife's vilasā is present in greater degree in him than in me."

In the *Sahasranāmam* occurs a name of Ambā which means that Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī flank her and fan her with fly-whisks: "Sacāmara-Ramā-Vāṇī-savya-dakṣiṇa-sevitā". When the two are Ambā's companions or attendants, is there any wonder about the fact that those who worship Ambā will receive their grace [that of Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī] too in plenty?

Earlier, when the Ācārya, addressing Ambā, said : "You indeed are Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī and Pārvatī. You are the mahiṣī of the Turīya Brahman," he regarded Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī not as the deities of learning and wealth but as the Śakti of the Creator and the Śakti of the Protector. While they were each the Śakti of the deities performing the different functions, he thought of Ambā as the universal Śakti inhering in the functionless Brahman. In this stanza, Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī are the deities of learning and wealth but Ambā is the source of that learning, the source of that wealth. The Ācārya makes it known that if we worship Ambā we will be rewarded with both learning and wealth.

Who are the other important deities for whom Ambā is the authority? Kāma is one of them. Ambā's very name is Kāmeśvarī, or Kāmākṣī or Kāmakoṭi. Was not Kāma restored to life by her and "reinstated in authority". He is also her devotee and she gives him the boon of beauty, the third of the four rewards of worshipping Ambā. She makes Kāma

"Manmathākāra", one who has the form of Manmatha. In the hymn, the theme of which is the beauty of Ambā, the Ācārya speaks of the worshipper being rewarded with divine beauty. Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī are female deities. He states that the devotee of Ambā obtains such learning and affluence as to be envied by their husbands [of Sarasvatī and of Lakṣmī]. While speaking about the devotee who has received the full vilāsa[8] of Manmatha, the Ācārya observes that, seeing him, Ratī wonders whether he is her husband.

When knowledge, prosperity and beauty have been obtained in full measure, what more is there to desire? An astrologer, after examining the horoscope of a man, said to him: "Everything is excellent in your horoscope...but for one thing. The indications are your son will soon have to perform your obsequial rites." [In other words it means the death of the man was imminent.] What is the use of Ambā giving a person learning, affluence and good looks if he does not have a long life? No, Ambā does vouchsafe long life to her devotee, says the Ācārya: "Ciram jīvenneva". When a man is long-lived, has good looks, a bright physique, does it not mean he is blessed with good health? A life without illness is itself wealth that does not diminish, is it not so? Ambā grants her devotee a life free from ailments.

What else is needed? It is now that the Ācārya speaks of the highest good that the worship of Ambā brings. Learning, prosperity, good looks, longevity: a stage would come when we would wonder whether we have achieved anything of real value with all these. "We have not yet found a way to eternal happiness," so we would tell ourselves. "Enough of all these, learning, prosperity, good looks and long life. Let us now seek the way to everlasting happiness." But there is no need to go in quest of a new path. "So far we have worshipped Ambā for worldly benefits, let us hereafter worship her for our uplift in the next world. Let us pray to her for the same." When we think thus (or do so) Ambā will grant us her grace supreme. A man may obtain learning, affluence, good looks and long life even without worshipping Ambā because of his past karma. But however advanced in age he is he will not go further to think of the Ātman and inward progress. Such is the case with most people. However, when people who are not yet mellow enough to worship Ambā and obtain her blessings for this world, a stage will come in their life when they will develop an aversion for them (*i.e.* for prosperity, good looks and so on). That is the time when they will have the maturity of mind to turn to the higher things, the Ultimate Reality, the good things of the next world. What happens then?

Ciram jīvanneva kṣapita-paśupāśa-vyatikaraḥ
Parānandābhikhyam rasayati rasam tvadbhajanavān

"He who is devoted to you, worships you, lives long, and is freed from earthly animal ties, delights himself in the rasa that is famed as Brahmānanda."

"Paśu-pāśa": when a man lives by his natural instincts, without controlling his mind and is swayed by his senses, he lives like an animal. He is then in the state of a "paśu", and tethered to the bamboo stick called birth by the rope of karma. That rope or noose is pāśa. It is a man's desire that becomes his noose (don't we speak of "āśā-pāśa", the rope or noose of desire? It makes him go round the wheel of worldly existence, saṁsāra-cakra. The knife of jñāna cuts that noose and frees the animal that is the individual Self from the whirl of worldly existence. Then he is no longer a paśu, an animal, but Śiva, the Lord of animals. He experiences what the stanza calls "parānanda", the bliss that is beyond everything, the rasa of Brahmānanda: indeed he becomes that rasa himself. This experience is everlasting; it is bliss that has no end. "Ciram jīvan": living long he shines as the embodiment of the rasa of bliss, ānandarasa. It is what is called the bliss of non-dualistic deliverance. It is not stated that the devotee imbibes, "pibat", the parānanda rasa; nor is it stated that he tastes it, "āsvādayati". Were it so stated it would mean that bliss and the one who experiences it are different entities. The Ācārya says "rasam rasayati". Which means that the one who experiences the rasa becomes one with it non-dualistically.

Does the word ''become'' (used in the last sentence) mean that the devotee becomes one with the parānanda rasa on his own? It is Ambā who makes him so. If he achieves this state as a result (as a "fruit'') of his worship or upāsanā it means that it is the deity he worships, the upāsya devatā, that has brought him to that state. She who brought him outwardly from non-dualism to dualism through the process of evolution, she alone can bring him inward again through the process of involution to his true non-dualistic state. The Ācārya says that Ambā does this to the man who worships her as his only refuge.

The Ācārya of Advaita has, in his catholic religious outlook, used here terms like "paśu" and "pāśa", terms representing an idea that later developed into an important system, that is Śaiva-Siddhānta. In the beginning he extols Śakti, raising her above Śiva, and in the end he makes her subservient to Śiva as his wife. He who speaks at great length about the Śākta system mentions, while concluding his hymn, one or two aspects of the Śaiva system.

One point occurs to me here. Why should the Ācārya, towards the end of his hymn, have spoken of Parāśakti as Śiva's dharma-patnī, one subservient to him? I have already mentioned a reason: that he wished to make her an example to the world in strīdharma[g]. The second reason that occurs to me is this: I have been saying again and again that the Ācārya is the picture of humility. So he may have also wanted to depict in the end the deity of his choice, Ambā, as the embodiment of humility. To put it differently: was it not Ambā herself who became the Ācārya and made him compose the hymn? She would have, in conclusion, found satisfaction only in showing herself as one who surrenders to Parameśvara, her husband, in all humility and as a satī subservient to him. That must be the reason why Ambā inspired the Ācārya to compose the stanza in the way he has done it.

Chapter 108

The Auspicious Conclusion

We have come to the end of the hymn, a hymn that is supremely auspicious. A wave or a stream has to complete its journey by mingling with the ocean. Thus the Ācārya completes his wave of words by mingling it with the ocean that is the embodiment of the Brahman of sound. Perhaps you know that the ocean is called "jalanidhi". "Salila" like "jala" also means water. The Ācārya uses the term "salilanidhi" for the ocean as he completes his beautiful hymn.

Pradīpa-jvālābhir divasakara-nīrājanavidhiḥ
Sudhāsūteścāndropala-jalalavaiḥ arghyaracanā
Svakīyairaṁbhobhiḥ salilanidhi-sauhityakaraṇam
Tvadīyābhir vāgbhistavajanani vācām stutiriyam

As often pointed out, the Ācārya's poetic genius is such that his treatment of a subject or of ideas is different from that of other poets. Other hymnodists have a phalaśruti placed at the end of their hymns. What novel idea does the Ācārya use in its place? Other hymnodists are devotees who are like the minion of the minion of the deities they adore. As for our Ācārya he is himself an incarnation, indeed a dual incarnation, that is an avatāra of the deity whom he sings, that is Ambā, and of Īśvara. Considering how other poets have a "big" phalaśruti for their devotional poems, should not the phalaśruti of the Ācārya's hymn be more exalted in character? Let us see the last stanza of his hymn.

The Ācārya proclaims himself to be humbler than all other poets, all other hymnodists. He says that he is indeed nothing. He seems to tell us: "I have composed a hymn, some sort of a hymn. And what kind of phalaśruti can I add to it? I am in fact not fit to speak of all this. I told you, did I not, about the rewards to be earned by those who are devoted to Ambā? What I said then would be enough. I would stop with it. You know what I am going to do finally? Whatever there is in this world, whether it is high or low, and whatever happens anywhere in the world and whoever is responsible for it, it is all to be ascribed to the power of

Ambā; it is all the product of her resolve. If everything were to belong to a uniformly high order, it would mean that there is something lacking in her sport. That is why she makes a number of entities appear low and thereby those that are high are seen further elevated in comparison. This *Saundaryalaharī* is rather a poor hymn and it was she (Ambā) who inspired me to compose it. Whatever its quality she is its source; she is the source of everything and so she is the mother of this also. She is the source of all words, all speech. Since this too is something made up of words, she is its mother. This is her child, is it not? I am concluding this hymn by placing this child at her feet, offering it at her feet." The Ācārya has composed his concluding stanza, the one-hundredth, thinking on these lines. In an earlier stanza (27) in which occur the words "japo jalpaḥ" he offers himself to Ambā; and now, in the end, he offers his hymn to her.

He is so much without conceit that he does not think that his work is good enough to be dedicated to Devī. He feels that it is foolish to offer it at the feet of the great Parāśakti thinking it to be a great work. But if he does offer his hymn to the goddess, it is because he is encouraged by three precedents, three strange precedents. What are the three?

The first is: "pradipa-jvālābhiḥ divasakara-nīrājana vidhiḥ." : that is burning a lump of camphor to perform nīrājana to the sun. "Divasa" means daytime. The one who causes daytime is the sun, "divasakara", also known as "divākara".

The Ācārya must have perhaps often seen pūjā performed on Saṅkrānti[1]; or he must have performed it himself. On the floor is drawn a *kolam*[2] as well as a picture of the Sun God. While the pūjā is performed to this representation [of Sūrya], the actual ārati, with the burning of camphor, is offered to the sun shining in the sky. Such is the pūjāvidhi [rules for the pūja of the Sun God].

The ārati performed with the burning of camphor throws light on all deities, on their idols, especially those installed in the dark garbhagṛhas[4] of temples. But what about the ārati performed to the Sun God? The sun is self-luminous and is it necessary to flaunt before him the light of a tiny lump of burning camphor? Not only does this lump of burning camphor not illumine the sun, its own light is lamentably dimmed by the latter. "Ambā is the effulgence of all the power of speech that is there in the world. Before such radiance my hymn is like the light of a tiny bit of burning camphor," so the Ācārya thinks to himself. "My hymn will not show her in a brighter light. Even the light naturally possessed by the words of my hymn becomes dim." Then why does the Ācārya offer his hymn to the goddess? He has seen wise and virtuous people burn camphor before the sun during the Saṅkrānti pūjā and the incandescent sun accepting the honour. He believes that Ambā, with her mind made cool by her compassion, will accept the hymn he has composed in her honour.

Whenever the Ācārya speaks of the burning sun he mentions immediately afterwards the moon with its cool radiance. Such is his custom and it shows his own heart that is cool with compassion. Here he refers to the second precedent in which the moon figures. He remembers the pūjā performed to Ambā by a learned man on a full moon day. When worshipping the entourage of Ambā he also adored the full moon which is to be regarded as the abode of Ambā. A pūjā consists of three rites of adoration with the sacred water. The first is "pādyam", that is washing the feet of the deity; the second is "arghyam", pouring water into the deity's hand; the third is "ācamanīyam", offerning water thrice, each time a spoonful, to the accompaninet of mantras. "Arghyam" literally means "venerable" and the rite going by that name is specially important. What did the learned man performing the pūja do for the arghyam? There was a moonstone by his side—-

There are two stones ''Candrakānta'' and ''Sūryakānta'', (moonstone and sunstone), mentioned in the ancient texts. We may take it that they existed in the past but are not to be seen these days. The sunstone draws into itself the sun's rays and ejects them in the form of fire. You know that if you focus sunlight on a piece of paper with a lens it burns. The sunstone does the same with greater intensity. The moonstone has the opposite effect. It attracts the moon's rays and ejects the same as cool water.

There was a moonstone in the hands of the learned man who was performing the Saṅkrānti pūjā. It attracted the moon's rays and exuded cool water and with this water he performed arghyam to the moon, uttering the words, ''Arghyam samarpayāmi''. The Acarya mentions this in the line: "Sudhā-sūteścandropalajalalavair arghyaracanā." "Candra-upalam"-"Candropalam". "Upalam" is stone: the Ācārya refers to the moonstone by the name "candropalam". The moon is believed to create amṛta, ambrosia; hence his name "sudhāsūti".

To offer libations to the moon with the water of the moonstone may be said to be more absurd than offering nīrājana to the sun by burning camphor to it. It cannot be said that if there were no sunlight there would be no camphor. Perhaps if there is no sun for three or four days the camphor cannot be lighted easily: this is all there is to the relationship between the sun and camphor. But the case of the moonstone is different: it will not yield water without the moon. It is the rays penetrating the stone that produce the water. The sun is an immense effulgence. Ambā's power of speech is like it, the sun's effulgence, and before it the Ācārya's hymn (so he thinks) is like the light of a tiny paring of camphor: this is the first simile. In the second simile, he says that the radiance of the full moon that is Ambā's compassion penetrated his heart of stone—which is like the moonstone—to produce the poetic water. The question here arises: What is the meaning of worshipping an entity with something that cannot be produced without that entity? [In other words the worshipped itself creates the object used in the worship.] Is this not absurd? But the Ācārya was encouraged to do it after seeing the learned man offering libations to the moon with water produced by the moonstone. This is the inner meaning.

The Ācārya now speaks of the third example (the third precedent) that gave him encouragement in composing the hymn. He had travelled through the land from Setu to the Himālaya. At Setu—that is Rāmeśvaram—a dip in the ocean is particularly sacred. At other places on our coastline bathing in the sea is permitted only on sacred occasions. But at Rameśvaram one may bathe at any time in the sea because such is the sacredness of the ocean there—it is a puṇya-tīrtha. Actually it is not wholly correct to say that "one may bathe" in the sea at Rameśvaram at any time — one *must* bathe there; it is obligatory to do so whenever one visits the place. The Ācārya must have seen pilgrims from all over the land bathing in the sea there and he himself must have bathed in it. Apart from the holy dip there, he must have seen people performing pūjā to the King of the Ocean, Varuṇa. He must have performed the pūjā himself. Bathing the deity is one of the rites of any pūjā. Here the ocean itself is the deity and how did they bathe such a vast ocean? What they did was most interesting—or one might say absurd. They took water from the ocean itself and sprinkled the same on it, chanting the mantra, "Apo hiṣṭā mayo bhuvaḥ." It is thus that they bathed the ocean. "Throughout the ages millions and millions of people have worshipped the ocean in this manner. Why cannot I gather a few words from the ocean of words that is Ambā to extol the very same Ambā?" He found an answer thus to his doubt. He expresses it in the third line of the stanza: "Svakiyairambhobhih salilanidhisauhityakaraṇam." The water is owned by the ocean, the "Salilanidhi". "Svakīyairaṁbhobhiḥ sauhityakaraṇam": the rite of bathing performed with the water that is owned by itself.

"Sauhityam" is generally understood as "tarpaṇa", not "snāna" or bath. The *Amarakośam* has this: "Sauhityam tarpaṇam tṛptiḥ." So it is customary to explain the line quoted above thus: "Like performing tarpana to the ocean with the water taken from it". [The Mahāsvāmī says that it was he who gave "sauhityam" the meaning of bathing.] The tarpaṇa, to whomsoever it is offered, need not be more than a few spoonfuls of water. In the Brahmayajña rite of Ṛgvedins one spoonful of water serves as tarpaṇa, not just to one ocean but to all the seas in the world. The one who performs the tarpaṇa says, "Samudrāstṛpyantu" ("Samudrāḥ tṛpyantu"). If it seems absurd to perform tarpaṇa to the ocean with its own water, I thought to myself, "Let it seem more absurd, bathing such a vast ocean with such a small quantity of water as contained in a spoon." That is why I gave the meaning of "snānam", bathing, to the word "sauhityam".

The literal meaning of the word "sauhityam" is doing good, doing what is pleasing. Is it not "sauhityam" to bathe in a hot country like ours? "Tarpaṇa" also means to satisfy. So let it be that the rite of bathing is performed [to the deity — in this case the ocean or Varuṇa] for its satisfaction. The more devoted one is the more foolish one's acts may appear to be, the more absurd. Intelligent people, intellectuals, may treat such acts with contempt. The more a devotee appears to be foolish the more sincere his devotion is likely to be, and this devotion itself is such as to dismiss with contempt that very intelligence or intellect that scorns it. It is on the basis of such understanding of true devotion that I changed the meaning of "sauhityam" from the usual sense in which it is understood.

The sun and camphor are two entirely distinct entities. The water produced by the moonstone is not wholly different from the moon. It is produced by the moon's rays going into the stone. But the stone itself is different from the moon—is it not? However, the moon needs a medium like the stone (to create the water). But the water with which the ocean is bathed is indeed the water of the ocean itself. It does not emerge from any other medium...

Here the Ācārya observes that Ambā herself produced the hymn from his mind of stone. He goes further to say that there is no such entity as "he"—he negates himself as he goes to her for refuge. He believes that the hymn he has composed is nothing but a small quantity taken from the ocean of speech that is the goddess. When we go deeper and deeper into the hymn many meanings will be revealed to us, many truths, many figures of speech, many pearls and corals.

"Whether it is foolishness or cleverness, whatever it be, even that is nothing but you.'' [As said in an earlier stanza (35)], ''tvayi pariṇatāyām na hi param" : "Is there anything other than what is evolved from you? Even if I be a fool, I am not an entity different from you nor am I a self-born fool. You yourself became me (I), is it not so? There is none who can think himself to be 'I' and be separate from you. So what about my words, my hymn?

"The Sun God accepts the nīrājana offered with camphor without regarding it as foolish; the Moon God accepts the libation made with water ejected by the moonstone (water produced by his own rays penetrating the stone); Varuṇa accepts his own water (water taken from the sea) as something that pleases him. If they have the grace to do so, the magnanimity to do so, it is because of you, Ambā. It is you who filled them with grace, made them large-hearted. In the same way accept this hymn as nīrājana performed with words, as libation offered with words, as pūjā performed to you with words," thinking in this manner the Ācārya dedicates his work to Ambā.

"Tvadīyābhiḥ vāgbhih tava janani vācām stutiriyam.'' After invoking the mother of all languages, all speech, ''Vācām janani'', the Ācārya says: "This hymn to you is composed with words that are your own, with words that are your property. I did not do anything. It is all yours." Thus the Ācārya completes his hymn, going to Ambā for refuge, in an attitude of total surrender. Without claiming any proprietorial right to the hymn, which is the nectarine beauty that attracts the learned and the unlearned alike, he dedicates his *Saundaryalaharī* in all humility to Ambā; he offers it to her, makes an "arpaṇam" of it to her. Not having any idea of his humility, not understanding it adequately, we use the word "arpaṇam". But he himself must have thought like this: "Who am I to make an arpaṇam? Who am I to use a big word like 'arpaṇam' for my offering her what is her own?" He himself does not use in the stanza any word like "arpaṇam" or "samarpaṇam". But we recognise clearly that he offers himself at the feet of Ambā, he surrenders wholly to her.

When we follow the path of jñāna we realise in the end that we are ourselves the Paramātman. If we take the path of bhakti or devotion, in the end it is to erase ourselves, annihilate ourselves, and go to the deity we worship for refuge. When a man reduces himself to nothing, a vacuum is created and the Paramātman fills it—it is like air filling a vacuum. So the bliss of the Brahman realised in jñāna is realised in devotion too. The *Saundaryalaharī* is a devotional hymn. So the Ācārya teaches through it non-dualistic realisation through the surrender of the Self.

The Ācārya who was great in all respects was also great in that he had the humility and spirit of sacrifice to believe that all those qualities of his that made him great did not indeed belong to him. "Vidyā-vinaya-sampanna": if there was anyone who fully embodied learning, wisdom and humility to the full it was our Ācārya.

This is the lesson we must learn if we are his true disciples. It is not certain whether or not we will understand the lesson of Advaita. But we must learn this lesson of humility. Even if we have a little proficiency in some subject we become swollen-headed. In fact even if we are not proficient in anything we become "proficient" in our conceit. If we ponder a bit about how we are justified in being egoistic, in our being proud about anything, we will realise that all that we possess is her charity, that everything is given by her, and our heads will slant [in devotion and humility] and will be at her feet becoming light. We will then know that the happiness thus gained cannot be matched by anything else, any praise or title bestowed on us, any *ponnāḍai*[4]. What the Ācārya says here, that there is no word or speech that is not her gift, everything else that we possess. There is no power save what she has granted us. Not only words or speech, even our very breath is her gift. If we breathe on our own then it would mean we will not die. When we realise that our very life is not ours where is the cause for worry or fear? After all, all our worries and fears are ultimately connected with preserving our life. If we leave it to her as her province, as her responsibility, how much peace there will be for us?

Thus, if we learn to be submissive to Parāśakti, we will in the end become non-dualistically absorbed in her. When this last stanza of the hymn instructs us in humility it shows us the way to the Advaitik experience which is the essence of Brahmavidyā — and Brahmavidyā is the essence of all vidyās, all branches of learning, all sciences. This is the big unspoken phalaśruti of the hymn. It is only when there is the consciousness of "I" as the doer, as the "kartā", that we expect a reward for what we (what "I") have done, our actions. When the doer becomes submissive to Ambā, step by step, he finally reduces himself to nothing.

What is the way to humility? How do we submit ourselves to the Great Power? Is it to keep thinking of her, Parāśakti? To think of her in her vastness, in her plenitude, may not be possible. But here our Ācārya recaptures her in a form that we can understand, in the form of beauty. With his words he paints a portrait of beauty — from Ambā's crown of gold, "kirīṭam te haimam", going on to her neck, hands, wrists, waist down to her feet. He decorates her with his words, even the soles of her feet, decorates her with the ornaments of his words and their meaning, and in the end he offers himself at those feet, encrusts those feet with himself becoming a big ornament. To see Ambā decorated with our devout thoughts and words is the remedy for our ahankāra, our ego-sense. Our intelligence, speaking and writing skill and so on, which are the cause of our pride, are after all her gift to us and if we return the same to her, offer them to her, our ego-sense will be destroyed. It is not of literary talent alone that she is the source, she is the matrix of all arts and of all sciences and, if we use our proficiency in any of them to decorate her in our devotion to her, it will become instrumental in our inner growth. Any occupation, any work, will be a means to reach her.

The Ācārya has hymned Ambā, the Beautiful Mother, in words of beauty, in images that enchant us and arouse noble emotions. In this way he has helped us to grasp Ambā joyfully, blissfully.

As we read the hymn, love and devotion for Ambā will spring in our hearts and that love itself will be an adornment for us. As the Ācārya bedecks her with his words, the love and devotion inspired in us for her become our own adornment. It is this love that is true beauty, true adornment. As mentioned earlier, is it not Ambā's love that has become a beautiful flow of her beautiful form, saundaryalaharī? So, by reading the hymn, if we become steeped in this love, all of us, who read it, will become saundaryalaharī. Here we have non-dualism : the hymn, the goddess hymned, the devotee who reads the hymn, all become saundaryalaharī, all become united in the wave of beauty, in the river of beauty. I left out the author of the hymn. He (the Ācārya) himself says that he is not the author of the work. But how can we leave him out? In fact he is the great Saundaryalaharī. On one side he is saundaryalaharī because of his love for Ambā and on the other he is saundaryalaharī again because of his compassion for all of us. It is to connect the two that he has composed the hymn that is the *Saundaryalaharī*. Things are joined together, connected, with bridges. But the Ācārya who does everything in a novel way joins the two together by swelling the laharī, by creating a flood of the laharī.

By bathing again and again in the *Saundaryalaharī* we must become one with it, *become it.* If you ask whether in that case our body too, each part of it, will become beautiful like Ambā's, the answer is it need not be so as far as our physique is concerned. But in the eyes of the world every part, every limb, will appear beautiful in that manner. It is all because of the incomparable lustre imparted by love. If there is a great devotee of Ambā why are our eyes riveted on him? Why does our mind draw us to him, exhorting us, "See him. See him"? "Like mother like son." Thus is it not the beauty imparted to the man by his devotion to Ambā that draws us to him and bids us to gaze at him again and again? A man may look ungainly outwardly; he may be deformed and dark-skinned and have sunken eyes. But if he is absorbed in Ambā, absorbed in her beautiful form, and if her feet are implanted in his heart, people will throng to see him. They will stand on their toes so as to behold him better. Why are they eager to have a glimpse of him? Why do they desire to look at him again and again as an embodiment of beauty? Despite all his physical drawbacks, he looks beautiful because he is like a child whose body exudes the milk of the jñāna and love he has imbibed, because he is free from sins and from every type of falsehood, because love comes wave after wave from him and because love for all comes welling up in his heart. Let him be bald-headed but since his head is pressed down by Ambā's feet, since Ambā's feet have sunk into it, it attracts us as the goddess's own head that has a crown of gold on it—"kirīṭam te haimam". Let his face be twisted or contorted, but since he constantly keeps thinking of Ambā how happy and bright it looks. One would be inclined to sing looking at him, "Tava vadana-saundaryalaharī" ("the wave of beauty of your face"). What if his eyes are sunken? Do they not rain the nectar of her compassion? Then his eyes too can be said to be "daradalitanīlotpalam". Let his lips be flat but how many loving words does his mouth utter, words belonging to the Mother herself. Indeed that mouth is revealed as Ambā's own mouth which, according to the Ācārya, is superior to "vidrumalatā" and "bimba" [lovelier than coral and the bimba fruit].

Let the man be as dark as dark can be in complexion. But soaked in devotion and love that he is, he is for that reason immersed in universal compassion—and this imparts a lustrous red hue to him reminding us of the words "jayati karuṇā kācidaruṇā". Every movement of his hand conveys blessings to the world and brings prosperity and happiness of every kind. That being so, can there be anything which possesses in greater degree the auspicious redness of the newly blossomed lotus ("nava-nalina-rāgam") mingled with the essence of the lac smeared on the soles of Lakṣmī's feet ("Lakṣmī-caraṇatala-lākṣā-rasam")? Wherever he places his foot, we roll there mentally and for the time being at least our inner organs (antaḥ-karaṇa) become absorbed there. This is what is meant by the bee of our life with its six feet made up of our senses ("karaṇa-caranaḥ-ṣad-caraṇa") becoming one with Ambā's lotus feet or pāda-padma.

If a person is a child of Ambā he will not be like us. His very form, his very appearance, will change. His eyes will be different, his face will be different, his speech will be different, the way he gestures, the way he moves his hands and legs will be different. Thus the beauty within him will be manifested not only on his face but all over his body, from his feet to the hair on his head. He will be a child's child, a mother's mother. He will bring comfort to people in distress, people suffering in various ways.

We too must become saundaryalaharī, the wave of beauty, the flood of beauty. For that purpose we must become immersed in this hymn, *Saundaryalaharī*, bathe in it again and again, become steeped in it, and become Ambā's children. Addressing Ambā as "vācām janani", mother of words, mother of speech, the Ācārya concludes his hymn, the child that is his stotra, joining it with its mother: "This is a hymn to you made up of your own words" ("Tvadīyābhir vāgbhih stutiriyam"). He brings the child that is his hymn with its mother. His *Sivānandalaharī* hymn is a maiden he marries to Iśvara. If it is a male deity the self-surrender is made to him in the attitude of a nāyikā ("heroine" or bride). That is why the Ācārya concludes the *Sivanandalaharī* by marrying his hymn to Īśvara. A female deity is Mother and each one of us is an innocent child of hers. "Whatever mother does, however it be, is right": a child who adopts such an attitude surrenders to its mother. That is why the Ācārya makes the *Saundaryalaharī* a child and entrusts it to "vācām janani", the mother of speech. In this way he asks all of us to be children—he asks each one of us to be a child — and cling to her, the Mother. He does more than merely ask us to do so. In his great compassion he opens up a way for it, to make us cling to her, to join us with her, by blessing us with this marvellous hymn.

The purpose of the gift the Ācārya makes us in his grace, the gift of the *Saundaryalaharī* is this: all of us must remain Ambikā's children, always adoring her, the World Mother, and always making obeisance to her. Indeed we must pay obeisance to her through this very hymn, dissolve our Ātman in the beautiful form embodied by saccidānanda [existence-consiousness-bliss] and remain blissful, no, remain as bliss itself.

It is as an āśirvāda, as a benedictory rite and as an indication of what is auspicious, that the Ācārya who has performed pūjā to Ambā through his very hymn includes in the concluding stanza what he calls "nīrājana vidhiḥ", an ārati, the waving of lamps. The light cast by the lamps of the sacred Kārtikā festival—wherever it falls—frees all, whether worms or insects, trees or plants, frees them from the cycle of birth and death, and confers on them ineffable bliss. Similarly, this dīparādhana, the worship with lamps, performed by the World Preceptor to the World Mother —that is the radiant grace of this hymn —— must cast its light on all creatures and fill the world with the beauty called love.

Namaḥ Pārvatī-pataye
Hara-Hara-Mahādeva

Notes & References

[1] Saṅkrānti: Passage of the sun from one rāśi (zodiacal sign) into another.

[2] *Kolam,* Tamil word meaning beauty but generally refers to designs drawn on the floor (on the earth) with rice powder or rice paste. *Kolam* is a sign of auspiciousness.

3 Garbhagṛha is sanctum sanctorum.

[4] *Ponnāḍai,* Tamil word meaning a gold-bordered upper cloth presented to individuals as a mark of honour. Mahāvastra.

Saundaryalaharī

सौन्दर्यलहरी

(Text in Devanāgarī & in Roman)

सौन्दर्यलहरी

शिवश्शक्त्या युक्तो यदि भवति शक्तः प्रभवितुं
न चेदेवं देवो न खलु कुशलः स्पन्दितुमपि ।
अतस्त्वामाराध्यां हरिहरविरिञ्चादिभिरपि
प्रणन्तुं स्तोतुं वा कथमकृतपुण्यः प्रभवति ।।१।।

तनीयांसं पांसुं तव चरणपङ्केरुहभवं
विरिञ्चिस्संचिन्वन् विरचयति लोकानविकलम् ।
वहत्येनं शौरिः कथमपि सहस्रेण शिरसां
हरः संक्षुद्यैनं भजति भसितोद्धूलनविधिम् ।।२।।

अविद्यानामन्तस्तिमिरमिहिरद्वीपनगरी
जडानां चैतन्यस्तबकमकरन्दस्रुतिझरी ।
दरिद्राणां चिन्तामणिगुणनिका जन्मजलधौ
निमग्नानां दंष्ट्रा मुररिपु-वराहस्य भवति ।।३।।

त्वदन्यः पाणिभ्यामभयवरदो दैवतगणः
त्वमेका नैवासि प्रकटितवराभीत्यभिनया ।
भयात् त्रातुं दातुं फलमपि च वाञ्छासमधिकं
शरण्ये लोकानां तव हि चरणावेव निपुणौ ।।४।।

हरिस्त्वामाराध्य प्रणतजनसौभाग्यजननीं
पुरा नारी भूत्वा पुररिपुमपि क्षोभमनयत् ।
स्मरोऽपि त्वां नत्वा रतिनयनलेह्येन वपुषा
मुनीनामप्यन्तः प्रभवति हि मोहाय महताम् ।।५।।

Saundaryalaharī

śivaś śaktyā yukto yadi bhavati śaktaḥ prabhavituṁ
na cedevaṁ devo na khalu kuśalaḥ spanditumapi
atastvām-ārādhyāṁ hari-hara-viriñcādibhir-api
praṇantuṁ stotuṁ vā kathamakṛtapuṇyaḥ prabhavati 1

tanīyāṁsaṁ pāṁsuṁ tava caraṇa-paṅkeruha-bhavaṁ
viriñcis saṁcinvan viracayati lokānavikalam
vahatyenaṁ śauriḥ kathamapi sahasreṇa śirasāṁ
haraḥ saṁkṣudyainaṁ bhajati bhasitoddhūlana-vidhim 2

avidyānām-antas-timira-mihira-dvīpanagarī
jaḍānāṁ caitanya-stabaka-makaranda-srutijharī
daridrāṇāṁ cintāmaṇiguṇanikā janmajaladhau
nimagnānāṁ daṁṣṭrā muraripu-varāhasya bhavati 3

tvadanyaḥ pāṇibhyām-abhayavarado daivatagaṇaḥ
tvamekā naivāsi prakaṭīta-varābhītyabhinayā
bhayāt trātuṁ dātuṁ phalamapi ca vāñchāsamadhikaṁ
śaraṇye lokānāṁ tava hi caraṇāveva nipuṇau 4

haristvāmārādhya praṇata-jana-saubhāgya-jananīṁ
purā nārī bhūtvā puraripumapi kṣobhamanayat
smaro'pi tvāṁ natvā ratinayana-lehyena vapuṣā
munīnāmapyantaḥ prabhavati hi mohāya mahatām 5

धनुः पौष्पं मौर्वी मधुकरमयी पञ्च विशिखाः
वसन्तः सामन्तो मलयमरुदायोधनरथः ।
तथाप्येकः सर्वं हिमगिरिसुते कामपि कृपां
अपाङ्गात्ते लब्ध्वा जगदिदमनङ्गो विजयते ॥६॥

क्वणत्काञ्चीदामा करिकलभकुम्भस्तननता
परिक्षीणा मध्ये परिणतशरच्चन्द्रवदना ।
धनुर्बाणान् पाशं सृणिमपि दधाना करतलैः
पुरस्तादास्तां नः पुरमथितुराहोपुरुषिका ॥७॥

सुधासिन्धोर्मध्ये सुरविटपिवाटीपरिवृते
मणिद्वीपे नीपोपवनवति चिन्तामणिगृहे ।
शिवाकारे मञ्चे परमशिवपर्यङ्कनिलयां
भजन्ति त्वां धन्याः कतिचन चिदानन्दलहरीम् ॥८॥

महीं मूलाधारे कमपि मणिपूरे हुतवहं
स्थितं स्वाधिष्ठाने हृदि मरुतमाकाशमुपरि ।
मनोऽपि भ्रूमध्ये सकलमपि भित्त्वा कुलपथं
सहस्रारे पद्मे सह रहसि पत्या विहरसे ॥९॥

सुधाधारासारैश्चरणयुगलान्तर्विगलितैः
प्रपञ्चं सिञ्चन्ती पुनरपि रसाम्नायमहसः ।
अवाप्य स्वां भूमिं भुजगनिभमध्युष्टवलयं
स्वमात्मानं कृत्वा स्वपिषि कुलकुण्डे कुहरिणि ॥१०॥

dhanuḥ pauṣpaṁ maurvī madhukaramayī pañca viśikhāḥ
vasantaḥ sāmanto malayamarudāyodhana-rathaḥ
tathāpyekaḥ sarvaṁ himagirisute kāmapi kṛpāṁ
apāṅgātte labdhvā jagadidam-anaṅgo vijayate 6

kvaṇatkāñcī-dāmā karikalabha-kuṁbha-stana-natā
parikṣīṇā madhye pariṇata-śaraccandra-vadanā
dhanur-bāṇān pāśaṁ sṛṇimapi dadhānā karatalaiḥ
purastādāstāṁ naḥ puramathitur-āhopuruṣikā 7

sudhāsindhor-madhye suraviṭapi-vāṭī-parivṛte
maṇidvīpe nīpopavanavati cintāmaṇi-gṛhe
śivākāre mañce paramaśiva-paryaṅkanilayāṁ
bhajanti tvāṁ dhanyāḥ katicana cidānanda-laharīṁ 8

mahīṁ mūlādhāre kamapi maṇipūre hutavahaṁ
sthitaṁ svādhiṣṭhāne hṛdi marutam-ākāśamupari
mano'pi bhrūmadhye sakalamapi bhittvā kulapathaṁ
sahasrāre padme saha rahasi patyā viharase 9

sudhādhārāsāraiś-caraṇayugalāntar-vigalitaiḥ
prapañcaṁ siñcantī punarapi rasāmnāya-mahasaḥ
avāpya svāṁ bhūmiṁ bhujaganibham-adhyuṣṭa-valayaṁ
svamātmānaṁ kṛtvā svapiṣi kulakuṇḍe kuhariṇi 10

चतुर्भिः श्रीकण्ठैः शिवयुवतिभिः पञ्चभिरपि
प्रभिन्नाभिः शम्भोर्नवभिरपि मूलप्रकृतिभिः ।
चतुश्चत्वारिंशद्वसुदलकलाश्रत्रिवलय-
त्रिरेखाभिः सार्धं तव शरणकोणाः परिणताः ।।११।।

त्वदीयं सौन्दर्यं तुहिनगिरिकन्ये तुलयितुं
कवीन्द्राः कल्पन्ते कथमपि विरिञ्चिप्रभृतयः ।
यदालोकौत्सुक्यादमरललना यान्ति मनसा
तपोभिर्दुष्प्रापामपि गिरिशसायुज्यपदवीम् ।।१२।।

नरं वर्षीयांसं नयनविरसं नर्मसु जडं
तवापाङ्गालोके पतितमनुधावन्ति शतशः ।
गलद्वेणीबन्धाः कुचकलशविस्रस्तसिचया
हठात् त्रुट्यत्काञ्च्यो विगलितदुकूला युवतयः ।।१३।।

क्षितौ षट्पञ्चाशद्-द्विसमधिकपञ्चाशदुदके
हुताशे द्वाषष्टिश्चतुरधिकपञ्चाशदनिले ।
दिवि द्विःषट्त्रिंशन्मनसि च चतुःषष्टिरिति ये
मयूखास्तेषामप्युपरि तव पादाम्बुजयुगम् ।।१४।।

शरज्ज्योत्स्नाशुद्धां शशियुतजटाजूटमकुटां
वरत्रासत्राणस्फटिकघटिकापुस्तककराम् ।
सकृन्न त्वा नत्वा कथमिव सतां संनिदधते
मधुक्षीरद्राक्षामधुरिमधुरीणाः फणितयः ।।१५।।

caturbhiḥ śrīkaṇṭhaiḥ śivayuvatibhiḥ pañcabhirapi
prabhinnābhiḥ śambhornavabhirapi mūlaprakṛtibhiḥ
catuścatvāriṁśad-vasudala-kalāśra-trivalaya-
trirekhābhiḥ sārdhaṁ tava śaraṇakoṇāḥ pariṇatāḥ 11

tvadīyaṁ saundaryaṁ tuhinagirikanye tulayituṁ
kavīndrāḥ kalpante kathamapi viriñci-prabhṛtayaḥ
yadālokautsukyād-amaralalanā yānti manasā
tapobhir-duṣprāpāmapi giriśa-sāyujya-padavīm 12

naraṁ varṣīyāṁsaṁ nayanavirasaṁ narmasu jaḍaṁ
tavāpāṅgāloke patitam-anudhāvanti śataśaḥ
galadveṇībandhāḥ kucakalaśa-visrasta-sicayā
haṭhāt truṭyatkāñcyo vigalita-dukūlā yuvatayaḥ 13

kṣitau ṣaṭpañcāśad-dvisamadhika-pañcāśadudake
hutāśe dvāṣaṣṭiś-caturadhika-pañcāśad-anile
divi dviḥṣaṭtriṁśan-manasi ca catuḥṣaṣṭiriti ye
mayūkhās-teṣām-apyupari tava pādāmbuja-yugam 14

śarajjyotsnā-śuddhāṁ śaśiyuta-jaṭājūṭa-makuṭāṁ
vara-trāsa-trāṇa-sphaṭikaghaṭikā-pustaka-karām
sakṛnna tvā natvā kathamiva satāṁ sannidadhate
madhu-kṣīra-drākṣā-madhurima-dhurīṇāḥ phaṇitayaḥ 15

कवीन्द्राणां चेतःकमलवनबालातपरुचिं
भजन्ते ये सन्तः कतिचिदरुणामेव भवतीम् ।
विरिञ्चिप्रेयस्यास्तरुणतरशृङ्गारलहरी-
गभीराभिर्वाग्भिर्विदधति सतां रञ्जनममी ।।१६।।

सवित्रीभिर्वाचां शशिमणिशिलाभङ्गरुचिभिर्-
वशिन्याद्याभिस्त्वां सह जननि संचिन्तयति यः।
स कर्ता काव्यानां भवति महतां भङ्गिरुचिभिर्-
वचोभिर्वाग्देवीवदनकमलामोदमधुरैः ।।१७।।

तनुच्छायाभिस्ते तरुणतरणिश्रीसरणिभिर्-
दिवं सर्वामुर्वीमरुणिमनिमग्नां स्मरति यः ।
भवन्त्यस्य त्रस्यद्वनहरिणशालीननयनाः
सहोर्वश्या वश्याः कति कति न गीर्वाणगणिकाः ।।१८।।

मुखं बिन्दुं कृत्वा कुचयुगमधस्तस्य तदधो
हरार्धं ध्यायेद्यो हरमहिषि ते मन्मथकलाम् ।
स सद्यः संक्षोभं नयति वनिता इत्यतिलघु
त्रिलोकीमप्याशु भ्रमयति रवीन्दुस्तनयुगाम् ।।१९।।

किरन्तीमङ्गेभ्यः किरणनिकुरुम्बामृतरसं
हृदि त्वामाधत्ते हिमकरशिलामूर्तिमिव यः ।
स सर्पाणां दर्पं शमयति शकुन्ताधिप इव
ज्वरप्लुष्टान् दृष्ट्या सुखयति सुधाधारसिरया ।।२०।।

kavīndrāṇāṁ cetaḥ-kamalavana-bālātapa-ruciṁ
bhajante ye santaḥ katicidaruṇāmeva bhavatīm
viriñci-preyasyās-taruṇatara-śṛṅgāralaharī-
gabhīrābhir-vāgbhir-vidadhati satāṁ rañjanamamī 16

savitrībhir-vācāṁ śaśi-maṇi-śilā-bhaṅga-rucibhir
vaśinyādyābhis-tvāṁ saha janani saṁcintayati yaḥ
sa kartā kāvyānāṁ bhavati mahatāṁ bhaṅgirucibhir
vacobhir-vāgdevī-vadana-kamalāmoda-madhuraiḥ 17

tanucchāyābhiste taruṇa-taraṇi-śrīsaraṇibhir
divaṁ sarvām-urvīm-aruṇimanimagnāṁ smarati yaḥ
bhavantyasya trasyad-vanahariṇa-śālīna-nayanāḥ
sahorvaśyā vaśyāḥ kati kati na gīrvāṇa-gaṇikāḥ 18

mukhaṁ binduṁ kṛtvā kucayugamadhas-tasya tadadho
harārdhaṁ dhyayedyo haramahiṣi te manmathakalām
sa sadyaḥ saṁkṣobhaṁ nayati vanitā ityatilaghu
trilokīmapyāśu bhramayati ravīndu-stanayugām 19

kirantīm-aṅgebhyaḥ kiraṇa-nikurumbāmṛtarasaṁ
hṛdi tvāmādhatte himakaraśilā-mūrtimiva yaḥ
sa sarpāṇāṁ darpaṁ śamayati śakuntādhipa iva
jvarapluṣṭān dṛṣṭyā sukhayati sudhādhāra-sirayā 20

तटिल्लेखातन्वीं तपनशशिवैश्वानरमयीं
निषण्णां षण्णामप्युपरि कमलानां तव कलाम् ।
महापद्माटव्यां मृदितमलमायेन मनसा
महान्तः पश्यन्तो दधति परमाह्लादलहरीम् ॥२१॥

भवानि त्वं दासे मयि वितर दृष्टिं सकरुणां
इति स्तोतुं वाञ्छन् कथयति भवानि त्वमिति यः ।
तदैव त्वं तस्मै दिशसि निजसायुज्यपदवीं
मुकुन्दब्रह्मेन्द्रस्फुटमकुटनीराजितपदाम् ॥२२॥

त्वया हृत्वा वामं वपुरपरितृप्तेन मनसा
शरीरार्धं शम्भोरपरमपि शङ्के हृतमभूत् ।
यदेतत्त्वद्रूपं सकलमरुणाभं त्रिनयनं
कुचाभ्यामानम्रं कुटिलशशिचूडालमकुटम् ॥२३॥

जगत्सूते धाता हरिरवति रुद्रः क्षपयते
तिरस्कुर्वन्नेतत्स्वमपि वपुरीशस्तिरयति ।
सदापूर्वः सर्वं तदिदमनुगृह्णाति च शिवस्-
तवाज्ञामालम्ब्य क्षणचलितयोर्भ्रूलतिकयोः ॥२४॥

त्रयाणां देवानां त्रिगुणजनितानां तव शिवे
भवेत्पूजा पूजा तव चरणयोर्या विरचिता ।
तथाहि त्वत्पादोद्वहनमणिपीठस्य निकटे
स्थिता ह्येते शश्वन्मुकुलितकरोत्तंसमकुटाः ॥२५॥

taṭillekhā-tanvīṁ tapana-śaśi-vaiśvānara-mayīṁ
niṣaṇṇāṁ ṣaṇṇāmapyupari kamalānāṁ tava kalām
mahāpadmāṭavyāṁ mṛdita-malamāyena manasā
mahāntaḥ paśyanto dadhati paramāhlāda-laharīm 21

bhavāni tvaṁ dāse mayi vitara dṛṣṭiṁ sakaruṇāṁ
iti stotuṁ vāñchan kathayati bhavāni tvamiti yaḥ
tadaiva tvaṁ tasmai diśasi nijasāyujya-padavīṁ
mukunda-brahmendra-sphuṭa-makuṭa-nīrājitapadām 22

tvayā hṛtvā vāmaṁ vapur-aparitṛptena manasā
śarīrārdhaṁ śambhor-aparamapi śaṅke hṛtamabhut
yadetat tvadrūpaṁ sakalamaruṇābhaṁ trinayanaṁ
kucābhyamānamraṁ kuṭila-śaśicūdāla-makuṭam 23

jagatsūte dhātā hariravati rudraḥ kṣapayate
tiraskurvannetat svamapi vapur-īśas-tirayati
sadā pūrvaḥ sarvam tadidam-anugṛhṇāti ca śivas-
tavājñām-ālambya kṣaṇacalitayor bhrūlatikayoḥ 24

trayāṇāṁ devānāṁ triguṇa-janitānāṁ tava śive
bhavet pūjā pūjā tava caraṇayor-yā viracitā
tathā hi tvatpādodvahana-maṇipīṭhasya nikaṭe
sthitā hyete śaśvanmukulitakarottaṁsa-makuṭāḥ 25

विरिञ्चिः पञ्चत्वं व्रजति हरिराप्नोति विरतिं
विनाशं कीनाशो भजति धनदो याति निधनम् ।
वितन्द्री माहेन्द्री विततिरपि संमीलितदृशा
महासंहारेऽस्मिन् विहरति सति त्वत्पतिरसौ ॥२६॥

जपो जल्पः शिल्पं सकलमपि मुद्राविरचना
गतिः प्रादक्षिण्यक्रमणमशनाद्याहुतिविधिः ।
प्रणामस्संवेशस्सुखमखिलमात्मार्पणदृशा
सपर्यापर्यायस्तव भवतु यन्मे विलसितम् ॥२७॥

सुधामप्यास्वाद्य प्रतिभयजरामृत्युहरिणीं
विपद्यन्ते विश्वे विधिशतमखाद्या दिविषदः ।
करालं यत्क्ष्वेलं कवलितवतः कालकलना
न शंभोस्तन्मूलं तव जननि ताटङ्कमहिमा ॥२८॥

किरीटं वैरिञ्चं परिहर पुरः कैटभभिदः
कठोरे कोटीरे स्खलसि जहि जम्भारिमकुटम् ।
प्रणम्रेष्वेतेषु प्रसभमुपयातस्य भवनं
भवस्याभ्युत्थाने तव परिजनोक्तिर्विजयते ॥२९॥

स्वदेहोद्भूताभिर्घृणिभिरणिमाद्याभिरभितो
निषेव्ये नित्ये त्वामहमिति सदा भावयति यः ।
किमाश्चर्यं तस्य त्रिनयनसमृद्धिं तृणयतः
महासंवर्ताग्निर्विरचयति नीराजनविधिम् ॥३०॥

viriñciḥ pañcatvaṁ vrajati harirāpnoti viratiṁ
vināśaṁ kīnāśo bhajati dhanado yāti nidhanam
vitandrī māhendrī vitatirapi sammīlita-dṛśā
mahāsaṁhāre'smin viharati sati tvatpatir-asau 26

japo jalpaḥ śilpaṁ sakalamapi mudrāviracanā
gatiḥ prādakṣiṇya-kramaṇam-aśanādyāhuti-vidhiḥ
praṇāmaḥ saṁveśaḥ sukhamakhilam-ātmārpaṇa-dṛśā
saparyā-paryāyas-tava bhavatu yanme vilasitam 27

sudhāmapyāsvādya prati-bhaya-jarāmṛtyu-hariṇīṁ
vipadyante viśve vidhi-śatamakhādyā diviṣadaḥ
karālaṁ yat kṣvelaṁ kavalitavataḥ kālakalanā
na śaṁbhostanmūlaṁ tava janani tāṭaṅka-mahimā 28

kirīṭaṁ vairiñcaṁ parihara puraḥ kaiṭabhabhidaḥ
kaṭhore koṭīre skhalasi jahi jambhāri-makuṭam
praṇamreṣveteṣu prasabham-upayātasya bhavanaṁ
bhavasyābhyutthāne tava parijanoktir-vijayate 29

svadehodbhūtābhir-ghṛṇibhir-aṇimādyābhirabhito
niṣevye nitye tvām-ahamiti sadā bhāvayati yaḥ
kimāścaryaṁ tasya trinayana-samṛddhiṁ tṛṇayato
mahāsaṁvartāgnir-viracayati nīrājana-vidhim 30

चतुष्षष्ट्या तन्त्रैः सकलमतिसन्धाय भुवनं
स्थितस्तत्तत्सिद्धिप्रसवपरतन्त्रैः पशुपतिः ।
पुनस्त्वन्निर्बन्धादखिलपुरुषार्थैकघटना-
स्वतन्त्रं ते तन्त्रं क्षितितलमवातीतरदिदम् ॥३१॥

शिवश्शक्तिः कामः क्षितिरथ रविश्शीतकिरणः
स्मरो हंसश्शक्रस्तदनु च परामारहरयः ।
अमी हृल्लेखाभिस्तिसृभिरवसानेषु घटिता
भजन्ते वर्णास्ते तव जननि नामावयवताम् ॥३२॥

स्मरं योनिं लक्ष्मीं त्रितयमिदमादौ तव मनोर्
निधायैके नित्ये निरवधिमहाभोगरसिकाः ।
भजन्ति त्वां चिन्तामणिगुणनिबद्धाक्षवलयाः
शिवाग्नौ जुह्वन्तः सुरभिघृतधाराहुतिशतैः ॥३३॥

शरीरं त्वं शंभोः शशिमिहिरवक्षोरुहयुगं
तवात्मानं मन्ये भगवति नवात्मानमनघम् ।
अतश्शेषश्शेषीत्ययमुभयसाधारणतया
स्थितस्संबन्धो वां समरसपरानन्दपरयोः ॥३४॥

मनस्त्वं व्योम त्वं मरुदसि मरुत्सारथिरसि
त्वमापस्त्वं भूमिस्त्वयि परिणतायां न हि परम् ।
त्वमेव स्वात्मानं परिणमयितुं विश्ववपुषा
चिदानन्दाकारं शिवयुवति भावेन बिभृषे ॥३५॥

catuḥṣaṣṭyā tantraiḥ sakalam-atisandhāya bhuvanaṁ
sthitastattat-siddhi-prasava-paratantraiḥ paśupatiḥ
punas-tvannirbandhād-akhila-puruṣārthaika-ghaṭanā-
svatantraṁ te tantraṁ kṣititalam-avātītaradidam 31

śivaś śaktiḥ kāmaḥ ksitir-atha raviś śītakiraṇaḥ
smaro haṁsaś śakras-tadanu ca parā-māra-harayaḥ
amī hṛllekhābhis-tisṛbhir-avasāneṣu ghaṭitā
bhajante varṇāste tava janani nāmāvayavatām 32

smaraṁ yoniṁ lakṣmīṁ tritayam-idam-ādau tava manor
nidhāyaike nitye niravadhi-mahābhoga-rasikāḥ
bhajanti tvāṁ cintāmaṇi-guṇanibaddhākṣa-valayāḥ
sivāgnau juhvantaḥ surabhighṛta-dhārāhuti-śataiḥ 33

śarīraṁ tvaṁ śaṁbhoḥ śaśi-mihira-vakṣoruha-yugaṁ
tavātmānaṁ manye bhagavati navātmānam-anagham
ataḥ śeṣaḥ séṣityayam-ubhaya-sādhāraṇatayā
sthitaḥ śaṁbandho vāṁ samarasa-parānanda-parayoḥ 34

manastvaṁ vyoma tvaṁ marudasi marutsārathir-asi
tvamāpas-tvaṁ bhūmis-tvayi pariṇatāyāṁ na hi param
tvameva svātmānaṁ pariṇamayituṁ viśvavapuṣā
cidānandākāraṁ śivayuvati-bhāvena bibhṛṣe 35

तवाज्ञाचक्रस्थं तपनशशिकोटिद्युतिधरं
परं शंभुं वन्दे परिमिलितपार्श्वं परिचिता ।
यमाराध्यन् भक्त्या रविशशिशुचीनामविषये
निरालोकेऽलोके निवसति हि भालोकभुवने ॥३६॥

विशुद्धौ ते शुद्धस्फटिकविशदं व्योमजनकं
शिवं सेवे देवीमपि शिवसमानव्यवसिताम् ।
ययोः कान्त्या यान्त्याश्शशिकिरणसारूप्यसरणेः
विधूतान्तर्ध्वान्ता विलसति चकोरीव जगती ॥३७॥

समुन्मीलत्संवित्कमलमकरन्दैकरसिकं
भजे हंसद्वन्द्वं किमपि महतां मानसचरम् ।
यदालापादष्टादशगुणितविद्यापरिणतिर्
यदादत्ते दोषाद्गुणमखिलमद्भ्यः पय इव ॥३८॥

तव स्वाधिष्ठाने हुतवहमधिष्ठाय निरतं
तमीडे संवर्तं जननि महतीं तां च समयाम् ।
यदालोके लोकान् दहति महति क्रोधकलिते
दयार्द्रा या दृष्टिः शिशिरमुपचारं रचयति ॥३९॥

तडित्वन्तं शक्त्या तिमिरपरिपन्थिस्फुरणया
स्फुरन्नानारत्नाभरणपरिणद्धेन्द्रधनुषम् ।
तव श्यामं मेघं कमपि मणिपूरैकशरणं
निषेवे वर्षन्तं हरमिहिरतप्तं त्रिभुवनम् ॥४०॥

tavājñācakrasthaṁ tapana-śaśi-koṭi-dyutidharaṁ
paraṁ śaṁbhuṁ vande parimilita-pārśvaṁ paricitā
yamārādhyan bhaktyā ravi-śaśiśucīnām-aviṣaye
nirāloke'loke nivasati hi bhālokabhuvane 36

viśuddhau te śuddhasphaṭika-viśadaṁ vyomajanakaṁ
śivaṁ seve devīmapi śivasamāna-vyavasitām
yayoḥ kāntyā yāntyāśśaśikiraṇa-sārūpyasaraṇeḥ
vidhūtantardhvāntā vilasati cakorīva jagati 37

samunmīlatsaṁvit-kamala-makarandaika-rasikaṁ
bhaje haṁsadvandvaṁ kimapi mahatāṁ mānasacaram
yadālāpād-aṣṭādaśa-guṇita-vidyāpariṇatir
yadādatte doṣād-guṇam-akhilam-adbhyaḥ paya iva 38

tava svādhiṣṭhāne hutavaham-adhiṣṭhāya nirataṁ
tamīḍe saṁvartaṁ janani mahatīṁ tāṁ ca samayām
yadāloke lokān dahati mahati krodha-kalite
dayārdrā yā dṛṣṭiḥ śiśiram-upacāraṁ racayati 39

taḍitvantaṁ śaktyā timira-paripanthi-sphuraṇayā
sphuran-nānāratnābharaṇa-pariṇaddhendra-dhanuṣam
tava śyāmaṁ meghaṁ kamapi maṇipuraika-śaraṇaṁ
niṣeve varṣantaṁ haramihira-taptaṁ tribhuvanam 40

तवाधारे मूले सह समयया लास्यपरया
नवात्मानं मन्ये नवरसमहाताण्डवनटम् ।
उभाभ्यामेताभ्यामुदयविधिमुद्दिश्य दयया
सनाथाभ्यां जज्ञे जनकजननीमज्जगदिदम् ॥४१॥

गतैर्माणिक्यत्वं गगनमणिभिः सान्द्रघटितं
किरीटं ते हैमं हिमगिरिसुते कीर्तयति यः ।
स नीडेयच्छायाच्छुरणशबलं चन्द्रशकलं
धनुः शौनासीरं किमिति न निबध्नाति धिषणाम् ॥४२॥

धुनोतु ध्वान्तं नस्तुलितदलितेन्दीवरवनं
घनस्निग्धश्लक्ष्णं चिकुरनिकुरुम्बं तव शिवे ।
यदीयं सौरभ्यं सहजमुपलब्धुं सुमनसो
वसन्त्यस्मिन्मन्ये वलमथनवाटीविटपिनाम् ॥४३॥

तनोतु क्षेमं नस्तव वदनसौन्दर्यलहरी
परीवाहस्त्रोतःसरणिरिव सीमन्तसरणिः ।
वहन्ती सिन्दूरं प्रबलकबरीभारतिमिर-
द्विषां वृन्दैर्बन्दीकृतमिव नवीनार्ककिरणम् ॥४४॥

अरालैः स्वाभाव्यादलिकलभसश्रीभिरलकैः
परीतं ते वक्त्रं परिहसति पङ्केरुहरुचिम् ।
दरस्मेरे यस्मिन् दशनरुचिकिञ्जल्करुचिरे
सुगन्धौ माद्यन्ति स्मरदहनचक्षुर्मधुलिहः ॥४५॥

tavādhāre mūle saha samayayā lāsyaparayā
navātmānaṁ manye navarasa-mahātāṇḍava-naṭam
ubhābhyām-etābhyām-udaya-vidhimuddiśya dayayā
sanāthābhyāṁ jajñe janakajananīmajjagadidam 41

gatair-māṇikyatvaṁ gaganamaṇibhiḥ sāndraghaṭitaṁ
kirīṭaṁ te haimaṁ himagirisute kīrtayati yaḥ
sa nīḍeyacchāyā-cchuraṇa-śabalaṁ candra-śakalaṁ
dhanuḥ śaunāsīraṁ kimiti na nibadhnāti dhiṣaṇām 42

dhunotu dhvāntaṁ nas-tulita-dalitendīvara-vanaṁ
ghanasnigdha-ślakṣṇaṁ cikura-nikurumbaṁ tava śive
yadīyaṁ saurabhyaṁ sahajam-upalabdhuṁ sumanaso
vasantyasmin manye valamathana-vāṭī-viṭapinām 43

tanotu kṣemaṁ nas-tava vadanasaundaryalaharī
parīvāhasrotaḥsaraṇiriva sīmantasaraṇiḥ
vahanti sindūraṁ prabalakabarī-bhāra-timira-
dviṣāṁ vṛndair-bandīkṛtamiva navīnārka-kiraṇam 44

arālaiḥ svābhāvyād-alikalabha-saśrībhir-alakaiḥ
parītaṁ te vaktraṁ parihasati paṅkeruharucim
darasmere yasmin daśanaruci-kiñjalka-rucire
sugandhau mādyanti smaradahana-cakṣur-madhulihaḥ 45

ललाटं लावण्यद्युतिविमलमाभाति तव यद्
द्वितीयं तन्मन्ये मकुटघटितं चन्द्रशकलम् ।
विपर्यासन्यासादुभयमपि संभूय च मिथः
सुधालेपस्यूतिः परिणमति राकाहिमकरः ॥४६॥

भ्रुवौ भुग्ने किंचिद्भुवनभयभङ्गव्यसनिनि
त्वदीये नेत्राभ्यां मधुकररुचिभ्यां धृतगुणम् ।
धनुर्मन्ये सव्येतरकरगृहीतं रतिपतेः
प्रकोष्ठे मुष्टौ च स्थगयति निगूढान्तरमुमे ॥४७॥

अहः सूते सव्यं तव नयनमर्कात्मकतया
त्रियामां वामं ते सृजति रजनीनायकतया ।
तृतीया ते दृष्टिर्दरदलितहेमाम्बुजरुचिः
समाधत्ते सन्ध्यां दिवसनिशयोरन्तरचरीम् ॥४८॥

विशाला कल्याणी स्फुटरुचिरयोध्या कुवलयैः
कृपाधाराधारा किमपि मधुराभोगवतिका ।
अवन्ती दृष्टिस्ते बहुनगरविस्तारविजया
ध्रुवं तत्तन्नामव्यवहरणयोग्या विजयते ॥४९॥

कवीनां सन्दर्भस्तबकमकरन्दैकरसिकं
कटाक्षव्याक्षेपभ्रमरकलभौ कर्णयुगलम् ।
अमुञ्चन्तौ दृष्ट्वा तव नवरसास्वादतरलाव्-
असूयासंसर्गादलिकनयनं किञ्चिदरुणम् ॥५०॥

lalāṭaṁ lāvaṇya-dyuti-vimalam-ābhāti tava yad
dvitīyaṁ tanmanye makuṭaghaṭitaṁ candraśakalam
viparyāsa-nyāsād-ubhayamapi saṁbhūya ca mithaḥ
sudhālepasyūtiḥ pariṇamati rākā-himakaraḥ 46

bhruvau bhugne kiṁcid-bhuvana-bhaya-bhaṅga-vysanini
tvadīye netrābhyāṁ madhukara-rucibhyāṁ dhṛtaguṇam
dhanur-manye savyetarakara-gṛhītaṁ ratipateḥ
prakoṣṭhe muṣṭau ca sthagayati nigūḍhāntaram-ume 47

ahaḥ sūte savyaṁ tava nayanam-arkātmakatayā
triyāmāṁ vāmaṁ te sṛjati rajanīnāyakatayā
tṛtīyā te dṛṣṭir-daradalita-hemāmbuja- ruciḥ
samādhatte sandhyāṁ divasa-niśayor-antaracarīm 48

viśālā kalyāṇī sphuṭarucir-ayodhyā kuvalayaiḥ
kṛpādhārādhārā kimapi madhurābhogavatikā
avantī dṛṣṭiste bahunagara-vistāra-vijayā
dhruvaṁ tattannāma-vyavaharaṇa-yogyā vijayate 49

kavināṁ sandarbha-stabaka-makarandaika-rasikaṁ
kaṭākṣa-vyākṣepa-bhramarakalabhau karṇayugalam
amuñcantau dṛṣṭvā tava navarasāsvāda-taralāv-
asūyā-saṁsargād-alikanayanaṁ kiñcidaruṇam 50

शिवे शृङ्गारार्द्रा तदितरजने कुत्सनपरा
सरोषा गङ्गायां गिरिशचरिते विस्मयवती ।
हराहिभ्यो भीता सरसिरुहसौभाग्यजननी
सखीषु स्मेरा ते मयि जननि दृष्टिः सकरुणा ।।५१।।

गते कर्णाभ्यर्णं गरुत इव पक्ष्माणि दधती
पुरां भेत्तुश्चित्तप्रशमरसविद्रावणफले ।
इमे नेत्रे गोत्राधरपतिकुलोत्तंसकलिके
तवाकर्णाकृष्टस्मरशरविलासं कलयतः ।।५२।।

विभक्तत्रैवर्ण्यं व्यतिकरितलीलाञ्जनतया
विभाति त्वन्नेत्रत्रितयमिदमीशानदयिते ।
पुनः स्रष्टुं देवान् द्रुहिणहरिरुद्रानुपरतान्
रजः सत्त्वं बिभ्रत्तम इति गुणानां त्रयमिव ।।५३।।

पवित्रीकर्तुं नः पशुपतिपराधीनहृदये
दयामित्रैर्नेत्रैररुणधवलश्यामरुचिभिः ।
नदः शोणो गङ्गा तपनतनयेति ध्रुवममुं
त्रयाणां तीर्थानामुपनयसि संभेदमनघम् ।।५४।।

निमेषोन्मेषाभ्यां प्रलयमुदयं याति जगती
तवेत्याहुः सन्तो धरणिधरराजन्यतनये ।
त्वदुन्मेषाज्जातं जगदिदमशेषं प्रलयतः
परित्रातुं शङ्के परिहृतनिमेषास्तव दृशः ।।५५।।

śive śṛṅgārārdrā taditarajane kutsanaparā
saroṣā gaṅgāyāṁ giriśacarite vismayavatī
harāhibhyo bhītā sarasiruha-saubhāgya-jananī
sakhīṣu smerā te mayi janani dṛṣṭiḥ sakaruṇā 51

gate karṇābhyarṇaṁ garuta iva pakṣmāṇi dadhatī
purāṁ bhettuścittapraśama-rasa-vidrāvaṇa-phale
ime netre gotrādharapati-kulottaṁsa-kalike
tavākarṇākṛṣṭa-smaraśara-vilāsaṁ kalayataḥ 52

vibhakta-traivarṇyaṁ vyatikarita-līlāñjanatayā
vibhāti tvannetra-tritayam-idam-īśānadayite
punaḥ sraṣṭuṁ devān druhiṇa-hari-rudrānuparatān
rajaḥ sattvaṁ bibhrattama iti guṇānāṁ trayamiva 53

pavitrīkartuṁ naḥ paśupati-parādhīna-hṛdaye
dayāmitrair-netrair-aruṇa-dhavala-śyāma- rucibhiḥ
nadaḥ śoṇo gaṅgā tapanatanayeti dhruvamamuṁ
trayāṇāṁ tīrthānām-upanayasi saṁbhedam-anagham 54

nimeṣonmeṣābhyāṁ pralayamudayam yāti jagatī
tavetyāhuḥ santo dharaṇidhara-rājanyatanaye
tvadunmeṣājjātaṁ jagadidam-aśeṣaṁ pralayataḥ
paritrātuṁ śaṅke parihṛta-nimeṣās-tava dṛśaḥ 55

तवापर्णे कर्णेजपनयनपैशुन्यचकिता
निलीयन्ते तोये नियतमनिमेषाः शफरिकाः ।
इयं च श्रीर्बद्धच्छदपुटकवाटं कुवलयं
जहाति प्रत्यूषे निशि च विघटय्य प्रविशति ।।५६।।

दृशा द्राघीयस्या दरदलितनीलोत्पलरुचा
दवीयांसं दीनं स्नपय कृपया मामपि शिवे ।
अनेनायं धन्यो भवति न च ते हानिरियता
वने वा हर्म्ये वा समकरनिपातो हिमकरः ।।५७।।

अरालं ते पालीयुगलमगराजन्यतनये
न केषामाधत्ते कुसुमशरकोदण्डकुतुकम् ।
तिरश्चीनो यत्र श्रवणपथमुल्लङ्घ्य विलसन्
अपाङ्गव्यासङ्गो दिशति शरसन्धानधिषणाम् ।।५८।।

स्फुरद्गण्डाभोगप्रतिफलितताटङ्क्युगलं
चतुश्चक्रं मन्ये तव मुखमिदं मन्मथरथम् ।
यमारुह्य द्रुह्यत्यवनिरथमर्केन्दुचरणं
महावीरो मारः प्रमथपतये सज्जितवते ।।५९।।

सरस्वत्याः सूक्तीरमृतलहरीकौशलहरीः
पिबन्त्याः शर्वाणि श्रवणचुलुकाभ्यामविरलम् ।
चमत्कारश्लाघाचलितशिरसः कुण्डलगणो
झणत्कारैस्तारैः प्रतिवचनमाचष्ट इव ते ।।६०।।

tavāparṇe karṇejapanayana-paiśunya-cakitā
nilīyante toye niyatam-animeṣāḥ śapharikāḥ
iyaṁ ca śrīr-baddhacchada-puṭakavāṭaṁ kuvalayaṁ
jahāti pratyūṣe niśi ca vighaṭayya praviśati 56

dṛśā drāghīyasyā daradalita-nīlotpala-rucā
davīyāṁsaṁ dīnaṁ snapaya kṛpayā māmapi śive
anenāyaṁ dhanyo bhavati na ca te hāniriyatā
vane vā harmye vā samakara-nipāto himakaraḥ 57

arālaṁ te pālīyugalam-agarājanyatanaye
na keṣām-ādhatte kusuma-śara-kodaṇḍa-kutukam
tiraścīno yatra śravaṇapatham-ullaṅghya vilasan
apāṅga-vyāsaṅgo diśati śarasandhāna-dhiṣaṇām 58

sphuradgaṇḍābhoga-pratiphalita-tāṭaṅkayugalaṁ
catuścakraṁ manye tava mukhamidaṁ manmatharatham
yamāruhya druhyatyavaniratham-arkenducaraṇaṁ
mahāvīro māraḥ pramathapataye sajjitavate 59

sarasvatyāḥ sūktiramṛtalaharī-kauśalaharīḥ
pibantyāḥ śarvāṇi śravaṇa-culukābhyām-aviralam
camatkāra-ślāghācalita-śirasaḥ kuṇḍalagaṇo
jhaṇatkāraistāraiḥ prativacanam-ācaṣṭa iva te 60

असौ नासावंशस्तुहिनगिरिवंशध्वजपटि
त्वदीयो नेदीयः फलतु फलमस्माकमुचितम् ।
वहत्यन्तर्मुक्ताः शिशिरकरनिःश्वासगलितं
समृद्ध्या यत्तासां बहिरपि च मुक्तामणिधरः ॥६१॥

प्रकृत्याऽऽरक्तायास्तव सुदति दन्तच्छदरुचेः
प्रवक्ष्ये सादृश्यं जनयतु फलं विद्रुमलता ।
न बिम्बं तद्बिम्बप्रतिफलनरागादरुणितं
तुलामध्यारोढुं कथमिव विलज्जेत कलया ॥६२॥

स्मितज्योत्स्नाजालं तव वदनचन्द्रस्य पिबतां
चकोराणामासीदतिरसतया चञ्चुजडिमा ।
अतस्ते शीतांशोरमृतलहरीमाम्लरुचयः
पिबन्ति स्वच्छन्दं निशि निशि भृशं काञ्जिकधिया ॥६३॥

अविश्रान्तं पत्युर्गुणगणकथाम्रेडनजपा
जपापुष्पच्छाया तव जननि जिह्वा जयति सा ।
यदग्रासीनायाः स्फटिकदृषदच्छच्छविमयी
सरस्वत्या मूर्तिः परिणमति माणिक्यवपुषा ॥६४॥

रणे जित्वा दैत्यानपहृतशिरस्त्रैः कवचिभिः
निवृत्तैश्चण्डांशत्रिपुरहरनिर्माल्यविमुखैः ।
विशाखेन्द्रोपेन्द्रैः शशिविशदकर्पूरशकला
विलीयन्ते मातस्तव वदनताम्बूलकवलाः ॥६५॥

asau nāsāvaṁśas-tuhinagirivaṁśa-dhvajapaṭi
tvadīyo nedīyaḥ phalatu phalam-asmākamucitam
vahatyantarmuktāḥ śiśirakara-niḥśvāsa-galitaṁ
samṛddhyā yattāsāṁ bahirapi ca muktāmaṇidharaḥ 61

prakṛtyā''raktāyāstava sudati dantacchadaruceḥ
pravakṣye sādṛśyaṁ janayatu phalaṁ vidrumalatā
na bimbaṁ tadbimba-pratiphalana-rāgād- aruṇitaṁ
tulāmadhyāroḍhuṁ kathamiva vilajjeta kalayā 62

smitajyotsnājālaṁ tava vadanacandrasya pibatāṁ
cakorāṇām-āsīd-atirasatayā cañcu-jaḍimā
ataste śītāṁśor-amṛtalaharīm-āmlarucayaḥ
pibanti svacchandaṁ niśi niśi bhṛśaṁ kāñjikadhiyā 63

aviśrāntaṁ patyur-guṇagaṇa-kathāmreḍanajapā
japāpuṣpacchāyā tava janani jihvā jayati sā
yadagrāsīnāyāḥ sphaṭikadṛṣadacchacchavimayī
sarasvatyā mūrtiḥ pariṇamati māṇikyavapuṣā 64

raṇe jitvā daityān-apahṛta-śirastraiḥ kavacibhiḥ
nivṛttaiścaṇḍāṁśa-tripuraharanirmālya-vimukhaiḥ
viśākhendropendraiḥ śaśiviśada-karpūraśakalā
vilīyante mātastava vadanatāmbūla-kavalāḥ 65

विपञ्च्या गायन्ती विविधमपदानं पशुपतेः
त्वयारब्धे वक्तुं चलितशिरसा साधुवचने ।
तदीयैर्माधुर्यैरपलपिततन्त्रीकलरवां
निजां वीणां वाणी निचुलयति चोलेन निभृतम् ॥६६॥

करांग्रेण स्पृष्टं तुहिनगिरिणा वत्सलतया
गिरीशेनोदस्तं मुहुरधरपानाकुलतया ।
करग्राह्यं शम्भोर्मुखमुकुरवृन्तं गिरिसुते
कथंकारं ब्रूमस्तव चुबुकमौपम्यरहितम् ॥६७॥

भुजाश्लेषान्नित्यं पुरदमयितुः कण्टकवती
तव ग्रीवा धत्ते मुखकमलनालश्रियमियम् ।
स्वतः श्वेता कालागरुबहुलजम्बालमलिना
मृणालीलालित्यं वहति यदधो हारलतिका ॥६८॥

गले रेखास्तिस्रो गतिगमकगीतैकनिपुणे
विवाहव्यानद्धप्रगुणगुणसंख्याप्रतिभुवः ।
विराजन्ते नानाविधमधुररागाकरभुवां
त्रयाणां ग्रामाणां स्थितिनियमसीमान इव ते ॥६९॥

मृणालीमृद्वीनां तव भुजलतानां चतसृणां
चतुर्भिः सौन्दर्यं सरसिजभवः स्तौति वदनैः ।
नखेभ्यः संत्रस्यन् प्रथममथनादन्धकरिपोः
चतुर्णां शीर्षाणां सममभयहस्तार्पणधिया ॥७०॥

vipañcyā gāyantī vividham-apadānaṁ paśupateḥ
tvayārabdhe vaktuṁ calitaśirasā sādhuvacane
tadīyair-mādhuryair-apalapita-tantrīkalaravāṁ
nijāṁ vīṇāṁ vāṇi niculayati colena nibhṛtam 66

karāgreṇa spṛṣṭaṁ tuhinagiriṇā vatsalatayā
girīśenodastaṁ muhur-adharapānākulatayā
karagrāhyaṁ śambhor-mukhamukuravṛntaṁ girisute
kathaṁkāraṁ brūmastava cubukam-aupamyarahitam 67

bhujāśleṣānnityaṁ puradamayituḥ kaṇṭakavatī
tava grīvā dhatte mukhakamalanāla-śriyamiyam
svataḥ śvetā kālāgaru-bahula-jambālamalinā
mṛṇalī-lālityaṁ vahati yadadho hāralatikā 68

gale rekhāstisro gati-gamaka-gītaika-nipuṇe
vivāha-vyānaddha-praguṇaguṇa-saṁkhyā-pratibhuvaḥ
virājante nānāvidha-madhura-rāgākara-bhuvāṁ
trayāṇāṁ grāmāṇāṁ sthiti-niyama-sīmāna iva te 69

mṛṇālī-mṛdvīnāṁ tava bhujalatānāṁ catasṛṇāṁ
caturbhiḥ saundaryaṁ sarasijabhavaḥ stauti vadanaiḥ
nakhebhyaḥ saṁtrasyan prathama-mathanād-andhakaripoḥ
caturṇāṁ śīrṣāṇāṁ samam-abhayahastārpaṇa-dhiyā 70

नखानामुद्द्योतैर्नवनलिनरागं विहसतां
करानां ते कान्तिं कथय कथयामः कथमुमे ।
कयाचिद्वा साम्यं भजतु कलया हन्त कमलं
यदि क्रीडल्लक्ष्मीचरणतललाक्षारसचणम् ॥७१॥

समं देवि स्कन्दद्विपवदनपीतं स्तनयुगं
तवेदं नः खेदं हरतु सततं प्रस्नुतमुखम् ।
यदालोक्याशङ्काकुलितहृदयो हासजनकः
स्वकुम्भौ हेरम्बः परिमृशति हस्तेन झटिति ॥७२॥

अमू ते वक्षोजावमृतरसमाणिक्यकुतुपौ
न सन्देहस्पन्दो नगपतिपताके मनसि नः ।
पिबन्तौ तौ यस्मादविदितवधूसङ्गरसिकौ
कुमारावद्यापि द्विरदवदनक्रौञ्चदलनौ ॥७३॥

वहत्यम्ब स्तम्बेरमदनुजकुम्भप्रकृतिभिः
समारब्धां मुक्तामणिभिरमलां हारलतिकाम् ।
कुचाभोगो बिम्बाधररुचिभिरन्तः शबलितां
प्रतापव्यामिश्रां पुरदमयितुः कीर्तिमिव ते ॥७४॥

तव स्तन्यं मन्ये धरणिधरकन्ये हृदयतः
पयःपारावारः परिवहति सारस्वतमिव ।
दयावत्या दत्तं द्रविडशिशुरास्वाद्य तव यत्
कवीनां प्रौढानामजनि कमनीयः कवयिता ॥७५॥

nakhānām-uddyotair-navanalinarāgaṁ vihasatāṁ
karāṇāṁ te kāntiṁ kathaya kathayāmaḥ katham-ume
kayācidvā sāmyaṁ bhajatu kalayā hanta kamalaṁ
yadi krīḍallakṣmī-caraṇatala-lākṣārasa-caṇam 71

samaṁ devi skanda-dvipavadana-pītaṁ stanayugaṁ
tavedaṁ naḥ khedaṁ haratu satataṁ prasnuta-mukham
yadālokyāśaṅkākulita-hṛdayo hāsajanakaḥ
svakumbhau herambaḥ parimṛśati hastena jhaṭiti 72

amū te vakṣojāv-amṛtarasa-māṇikya-kutupau
na sandehaspando nagapati-patāke manasi naḥ
pibantau tau yasmād-avidita-vadhūsaṅga-rasikau
kumārāv- adyāpi dviradavadana-krauñcadalanau 73

vahatyamba stamberamadanuja-kumbhaprakṛtibhiḥ
samārabdhāṁ muktāmaṇibhir-amalāṁ hāralatikām
kucābhogo bimbādhara-rucibhirantaḥ śabalitāṁ
pratāpa-vyāmiśrāṁ puradamayituḥ kīrtimiva te 74

tava stanyaṁ manye dharaṇidharakanye hṛdayataḥ
payaḥpāravāraḥ parivahati sārasvatamiva
dayāvatyā dattaṁ draviḍaśiśurāsvādya tava yat
kavīnāṁ prauḍhānām-ajani kamanīyaḥ kavayitā 75

हरक्रोधज्वालावलिभिरवलीढेन वपुषा
गभीरे ते नाभीसरसि कृतसङ्गो मनसिजः ।
समुत्तस्थौ तस्मादचलतनये धूमलतिका
जनस्तां जानीते तव जननि रोमावलिरिति ॥७६॥

यदेतत्कालिन्दीतनुतरतरङ्गाकृति शिवे
कृशे मध्ये किञ्चिज्जननि तव यद्भाति सुधियाम् ।
विमर्दादन्योन्यं कुचकलशयोरन्तरगतं
तनूभूतं व्योम प्रविशदिव नाभिं कुहरिणीम् ॥७७॥

स्थिरो गङ्गावर्तः स्तनमुकुलरोमावलिलता
कलावालं कुण्डं कुसुमशरतेजोहुतभुजः ।
रतेर्लीलागारं किमपि तव नाभिर्गिरिसुते
बिलद्वारं सिद्धेर्गिरिशनयनानां विजयते ॥७८॥

निसर्गक्षीणस्य स्तनतटभरेण क्लमजुषो
नमन्मूर्तेर्नारीतिलक शनकैस्त्रुट्यत इव ।
चिरं ते मध्यस्य त्रुटिततटिनीतीरतरुणा
समावस्थास्थेम्नो भवतु कुशलं शैलतनये ॥७९॥

कुचौ सद्यः स्विद्यत्तटघटितकूर्पासभिदुरौ
कषन्तौ दोर्मूले कनककलशाभौ कलयता ।
तव त्रातुं भङ्गादलमिति वलग्नं तनुभुवा
त्रिधा नद्धं देवि त्रिवलि लवलीवल्लिभिरिव ॥८०॥

harakrodha-jvālāvalibhir- avalīḍhena vapuṣā
gabhīre te nābhīsarasi kṛtasaṅgo manasijaḥ
samuttasthau tasmād-acalatanaye dhūmalatikā
janastāṁ jānīte tava janani romāvaliriti 76

yadetatkālindī-tanutara-taraṅgākṛti śive
kṛśe madhye kiñcijjanani tava yadbhāti sudhiyām
vimardād-anyonyaṁ kucakalaśayor- antaragataṁ
tanūbhūtaṁ vyoma praviśadiva nābhiṁ kuhariṇīm 77

sthiro gaṅgāvartaḥ stanamukula-romāvali-latā
kalāvālaṁ kuṇḍaṁ kusumaśara-tejohutabhujaḥ
rater-līlāgāraṁ kimapi tava nābhir-girisute
Biladvāraṁ siddher-giriśanayanānāṁ vijayate 78

nisarga-kṣīṇasya stanataṭa-bhareṇa klamajuṣo
namanmūrter-nārītilaka śanakais-truṭyata iva
ciraṁ te madhyasya truṭita-taṭinī-tīra-taruṇā
samāvasthā-sthemno bhavatu kuśalaṁ śailatanaye 79

kucau sadyaḥ svidyat-taṭaghaṭita-kūrpāsabhidurau
kaṣantau dormūle kanakakalaśābhau kalayatā
tava trātuṁ bhaṅgādalamiti valagnaṁ tanubhuvā
tridhā naddhaṁ devi trivali lavalī-vallibhiriva 80

गुरुत्वं विस्तारं क्षितिधरपतिः पार्वति निजात्
नितम्बादाच्छिद्य त्वयि हरणरूपेण निदधे ।
अतस्ते विस्तीर्णो गुरुरयमशेषां वसुमतीं
नितम्बप्राग्भारः स्थगयति लघुत्वं नयति च ॥८१॥

करीन्द्राणां शुण्डान् कनककदलीकाण्डपटलीम्
उभाभ्यामूरुभ्यामुभयमपि निर्जित्य भवति ।
सुवृत्ताभ्यां पत्युः प्रणतिकठिनाभ्यां गिरिसुते
विधिज्ञे जानुभ्यां विबुधकरिकुम्भद्वयमसि ॥८२॥

पराजेतुं रुद्रं द्विगुणशरगर्भौ गिरिसुते
निषङ्गौ जङ्घे ते विषमविशिखो बाढमकृत ।
यदग्रे दृश्यन्ते दशशरफलाः पादयुगली-
नखाग्रच्छद्मानः सुरमकुटशाणैकनिशिताः ॥८३॥

श्रुतीनां मूर्धानो दधति तव यौ शेखरतया
ममाप्येतौ मातः शिरसि दयया धेहि चरणौ ।
ययोः पाद्यं पाथः पशुपतिजटाजूटतटिनी
ययोर्लाक्षालक्ष्मीररुणहरिचूडामणिरुचिः ॥८४॥

नमोवाकं ब्रूमो नयनरमणीयाय पदयोः
तवास्मै द्वन्द्वाय स्फुटरुचिरसालक्तकवते ।
असूयत्यत्यन्तं यदभिहननाय स्पृहयते
पशूनामीशानः प्रमदवनकङ्केलितरवे ॥८५॥

gurutvaṁ vistāraṁ kṣitidharapatiḥ pārvati nijāt
nitambād-ācchidya tvayi haraṇarūpeṇa nidadhe
ataste vistīrṇo gururayam-aśeṣāṁ vasumatīṁ
nitamba-prāgbhāraḥ sthagayati laghutvaṁ nayati ca 81

karīndrāṇāṁ śuṇḍān kanakakadalī-kāṇḍapaṭalīm
ubhābhyām-ūrubhyām-ubhayamapi nirjitya bhavati
suvṛttābhyāṁ patyuḥ praṇatikaṭhinābhyāṁ girisute
vidhijñe jānubhyāṁ vibudha-karikumbha-dvayamasi 82

parājetuṁ rudraṁ dviguṇaśaragarbhau girisute
niṣaṅgau jaṅghe te viṣamaviśikho bāḍham-akṛta
yadagre dṛśyante daśaśaraphalāḥ pādayugalī-
nakhāgracchadmānaḥ sura-makuṭa-śāṇaika-niśitāḥ 83

śrutīnāṁ mūrdhāno dadhati tava yau śekharatayā
mamāpyetau mātaḥ śirasi dayayā dhehi caraṇau
yayoḥ pādyaṁ pāthaḥ paśupati-jaṭājūṭa-taṭinī
yayor-lākṣā-lakṣmīr-aruṇa-haricūḍāmaṇi-ruciḥ 84

namovākaṁ brūmo nayana-ramaṇīyāya padayoḥ
tavāsmai dvandvāya sphuṭa-rucirasālaktakavate
asūyatyatyantaṁ yadabhihananāya spṛhayate
paśūnāmīśanaḥ pramadavana-kaṅkelitarave 85

मृषा कृत्वा गोत्रस्खलनमथ वैलक्ष्यनमितं
ललाटे भर्तारं चरणकमले ताडयति ते ।
चिरादन्त:शल्यं दहनकृतमुन्मूलितवता
तुलाकोटिक्वाणैः किलिकिलितमीशानरिपुणा ॥८६॥

हिमानीहन्तव्यं हिमगिरिनिवासैकचतुरौ
निशायां निद्राणं निशि चरमभागे च विशदौ ।
वरं लक्ष्मीपात्रं श्रियमतिसृजन्तौ समयिनां
सरोजं त्वत्पादौ जननि जयतश्चित्रमिह किम् ॥८७॥

पदं ते कीर्तीनां प्रपदमपदं देवि विपदां
कथं नीतं सद्भिः कठिनकमठीकर्परतुलाम् ।
कथं वा बाहुभ्यामुपयमनकाले पुरभिदा
यदादाय न्यस्तं दृषदि दयमानेन मनसा ॥८८॥

नखैर्नाकस्त्रीणां करकमलसङ्कोचशशिभिः
तरूणां दिव्यानां हसत इव ते चण्डि चरणौ ।
फलानि स्वःस्थेभ्यः किसलयकराग्रेण ददतां
दरिद्रेभ्यो भद्रां श्रियमनिशमह्नाय ददतौ ॥८९॥

ददाने दीनेभ्यः श्रियमनिशमाशानुसदृशीम्
अमन्दं सौन्दर्यप्रकरमकरन्दं विकिरति ।
तवास्मिन्मन्दारस्तबकसुभगे यातु चरणे
निमज्जन्मज्जीवः करणचरणः षड्चरणताम् ॥९०॥

mṛṣā kṛtvā gotraskhalanam-atha vailakṣyanamitaṁ
lalāṭe bhartāraṁ caraṇakamale tāḍayati te
cirādantaḥ śalyaṁ dahanakṛtam-unmūlitavatā
tulākoṭikvāṇaiḥ kilikilitam-īśānaripuṇā 86

himānī-hantavyaṁ himagiri-nivāsaika-caturau
niśāyāṁ nidrāṇaṁ niśi caramabhāge ca viśadau
varaṁ lakṣmīpātraṁ śriyam-atisṛjantau samayināṁ
sarojaṁ tvatpādau janani jayataścitramiha kim 87

padaṁ te kīrtīnāṁ prapadamapadaṁ devi vipadāṁ
kathaṁ nītaṁ sadbhiḥ kaṭhina-kamaṭhī-karparatulām
kathaṁ va bāhubhyām-upayamanakāle purabhidā
yadādāya nyastaṁ dṛṣadi dayamānena manasā 88

nakhair-nākastrīṇāṁ karakamala-saṅkoca-śaśibhiḥ
tarūṇāṁ divyānāṁ hasata iva te caṇḍi caraṇau
phalāni svaḥsthebhyaḥ kisalaya-karāgreṇa dadatāṁ
daridrebhyo bhadrāṁ śriyamaniśam-ahnāya dadatau 89

dadāne dīnebhyaḥ śriyamaniśam-āśānusadṛśīm
amandaṁ saundarya-prakaramakarandaṁ vikirati
tavāsmin mandāra-stabaka-subhage yātu caraṇe
nimajjan majjivaḥ karaṇacaraṇaḥ ṣaḍcaraṇatām 90

पदन्यासक्रीडापरिचयमिवारब्धुमनसः
स्खलन्तस्ते खेलं भवनकलहंसा न जहति ।
अतस्तेषां शिक्षां सुभगमणिमञ्जीररणित-
च्छलादाचक्षाणं चरणकमलं चारुचरिते ॥९१॥

गतास्ते मञ्चत्वं द्रुहिणहरिरुद्रेश्वरभृतः
शिवः स्वच्छच्छायाघटितकपटप्रच्छदपटः ।
त्वदीयानां भासां प्रतिफलनरागारुणतया
शरीरी शृङ्गारो रस इव दृशां दोग्धि कुतुकम् ॥९२॥

अराला केशेषु प्रकृतिसरला मन्दहसिते
शिरीषाभा चित्ते दृषदुपलशोभा कुचतटे ।
भृशं तन्वी मध्ये पृथुरुरसिजारोहविषये
जगत् त्रातुं शम्भोर्जयति करुणा काचिदरुणा ॥९३॥

कलङ्कः कस्तूरी रजनिकरबिम्बं जलमयं
कलाभिः कर्पूरैर्मरकतकरण्डं निबिडितम् ।
अतस्त्वद्भोगेन प्रतिदिनमिदं रिक्तकुहरं
विधिर्भूयो भूयो निबिडयति नूनं तव कृते ॥९४॥

पुरारातेरन्तःपुरमसि ततस्त्वच्चरणयोः
सपर्यामर्यादा तरलकरणानामसुलभा ।
तथा ह्येते नीताः शतमखमुखाः सिद्धिमतुलां
तव द्वारोपान्तस्थितिभिरणिमाद्याभिरमराः ॥९५॥

padanyāsa-krīḍā-paricayamivārabdhu-manasaḥ
skhalantaste khelaṁ bhavanakalahaṁsā na jahati
atasteṣāṁ śikṣāṁ subhagamaṇi-mañjīra-raṇita-
cchaladācakṣāṇaṁ caraṇakamalaṁ cārucarite 91

gatāste mañcatvaṁ druhiṇa-hari-rudreśvara-bhṛtaḥ
śivaḥ svaccha-cchāyā-ghaṭita-kapaṭa-pracchadapaṭaḥ
tvadīyānāṁ bhāsāṁ pratiphalana-rāgāruṇatayā
śarīrī śṛṅgāro rasa iva dṛśāṁ dogdhi kutukam 92

arālā keśeṣu prakṛtisaralā mandahasite
śirīṣābhā citte dṛṣadupalaśobhā kucataṭe
bhṛśaṁ tanvī madhye pṛthur-urasijāroha-viṣaye
jagat trātuṁ śambhor-jayati karuṇā kācidaruṇā 93

kalaṅkaḥ kastūrī rajanikara-bimbaṁ jalamayaṁ
kalābhiḥ karpūrair-marakatakaraṇḍaṁ nibiḍitam
atas-tvadbhogena pratidinamidaṁ riktakuharaṁ
vidhir-bhūyo bhūyo nibiḍayati nūnaṁ tava kṛte 94

purārāter-antaḥ-puramasi tatas-tvaccaraṇayoḥ
saparyā-maryādā taralakaraṇāṇām-asulabhā
tathā hyete nītāḥ śatamakhamukhāḥ siddhimatulāṁ
tava dvāropānta-sthitibhir-aṇimādyābhir-amarāḥ 95

कलत्रं वैधात्रं कति कति भजन्ते न कवयः
श्रियो देव्याः को वा न भवति पतिः कैरपि धनैः ।
महादेवं हित्वा तव सति सतीनामचरमे
कुचाभ्यामासङ्गः कुरवकतरोरप्यसुलभः ॥९६॥

गिरामाहुर्देवीं द्रुहिणगृहिणीमागमविदो
हरेः पत्नीं पद्मां हरसहचरीमद्रितनयाम् ।
तुरीया कापि त्वं दुरधिगमनिःसीममहिमा
महामाया विश्वं भ्रमयसि परब्रह्ममहिषि ॥९७॥

कदा काले मातः कथय कलितालक्तकरसं
पिबेयं विद्यार्थी तव चरणनिर्णेजनजलम् ।
प्रकृत्या मूकानामपि च कविताकारणतया
कदा धत्ते वाणीमुखकमलताम्बूलरसताम् ॥९८॥

सरस्वत्या लक्ष्म्या विधिहरिसपत्नो विहरते
रतेः पातिव्रत्यं शिथिलयति रम्येण वपुषा ।
चिरं जीवन्नेव क्षपितपशुपाशव्यतिकरः
परानन्दाभिख्यं रसयति रसं त्वद्भजनवान् ॥९९॥

प्रदीपज्वालाभिर्दिवसकरनीराजनविधिः
सुधासूतेश्चन्द्रोपलजललवैरर्घ्यरचना ।
स्वकीयैरम्भोभिः सलिलनिधिसौहित्यकरणं
त्वदीयाभिर्वाग्भिस्तव जननि वाचां स्तुतिरियम् ॥१००॥

kalatraṁ vaidhātraṁ kati kati bhajante na kavayaḥ
śriyo devyāḥ ko vā na bhavati patiḥ kairapi dhanaiḥ
mahādevaṁ hitvā tava sati satīnām-acarame
kucābhyām-āsaṅgaḥ kuravaka-taror-apyasulabhaḥ 96

girāmāhur-devīṁ druhiṇagṛhiṇīm-āgamavido
hareḥ patnīṁ padmāṁ harasahacarīm-adritanayām
turīyā kāpi tvaṁ duradhigama-niḥsīma-mahimā
mahāmāyā viśvaṁ bhramayasi parabrahmamahiṣi 97

kadā kāle mātaḥ kathaya kalitālaktakarasaṁ
pibeyaṁ vidyārthī tava caraṇa-nirṇejana-jalam
prakṛtyā mūkānamapi ca kavitā-kāraṇatayā
kadā dhatte vāṇīmukhakamala-tāmbūla-rasatām 98

sarasvatyā lakṣmyā vidhi-hari-sapatno viharate
rateḥ pātivratyaṁ śithilayati ramyeṇa vapuṣā
ciraṁ jīvanneva kṣapita-paśupāśa-vyatikaraḥ
parānandābhikhyaṁ rasayati rasaṁ tvadbhajanavān 99

pradīpa-jvālābhir-divasakara-nīrājanavidhiḥ
sudhāsūteś-candropala-jalalavair-arghyaracanā
svakīyairambobhiḥ salila-nidhi-sauhityakaraṇaṁ
tvadīyābhir-vāgbhis-tava janani vācāṁ stutiriyam 100

Appendix

The following three additional stanzas are included in most of the North Indian versions of the *Saundaryalaharī*.

समानीत: पद्मां मणिमुकुरतामम्बरमणि:
भयादस्यान्त: स्तिमितकिरणश्रेणिमसृण: ।
दधाति त्वद्वक्त्रप्रतिफलनमश्रान्तविकचं
निरातङ्कं चन्द्रान्निजहृदयपङ्केरुहमिव ।।१०१।।

Samānītaḥ padmām maṇimukuratāmaṁbaramaṇiḥ
Bhayādasyāntaḥ stimitakiraṇaśreṇimasṛṇaḥ
Dadhāti tvadvaktrapratiphalanamaśrāntavikacam
Nirātaṅkam candrānnijahṛdayapaṅkeruhamiva 101

The sun, having attained the lustre of a crystal mirror and having become mild with the rows of his rays that are softened for fear of scorching the face, bears the reflection of your face, as if it were his heart-lotus, ever in bloom and without any fear of the moon.

(The sun becomes a mirror suitable to reflect only Devi's feet. Yet, by her grace and his own constant meditation on her, he has gained the power to reflect her face.)

समुद्भूतस्थूलस्तनभरमुरश्चारुहसितं
कटाक्षे कन्दर्पा: कतिचन कदम्बद्युति वपु: ।
हरस्य त्वद्भ्रान्तिं मनसि जनयन्ति स्म विमला:
भवत्या ये भक्ता: परिणतिरमीषामियमुमे ।।१०२।।

Samudbhūtasthulastanabharamuraścāruhasitam
Kaṭākṣe kandarpāḥ katicana kadaṁbadyuti vapuḥ
Harasya tvadbhrāntim manasi janayanti sma vimalāḥ
Bhavatyā ye bhaktāḥ pariṇatiramīṣāmiyamume 102

Those who worship Devi, as one possessing a body shining like a kadamba tree and with well-developed breasts and as one with a charming smile and an enchanting sidelong glance, create in Hara the false impression that they are you yourself.

(Constant meditation on Devi takes the devotee to a divine state. The potency of upāsanā is elucidated in this stanza.)

निधे नित्यस्मेरे निरवधिगुणे नीतिनिपुणे
    निराघाटज्ञाने नियमपरचित्तैकनिलये ।
नियत्या निर्मुक्ते निखिलनिगमान्तस्तुतपदे
    निरातङ्के नित्ये निगमय ममापि स्तुतिमिमाम् ॥१०३॥

Nidhe nityasmere niravadhiguṇe nītinipuṇe
    Nirāghāṭajñane niyamaparacittaikanilaye
Niyatyā nirmukte nikhilanigamantasttapade
    Nirātaṅke nitye nigamaya mamāpi stutimimām 103

Oh Treasure! Ever smiling and possessed of infinite auspicious qualities, an expert in dispensing justice, you of boundless knowledge and residing solely in the hearts of devotees who have controlled their minds, you who are free from restraints and shining eternally, your feet are adored by all the Upaniṣads. I pray for your grace to hallow this, my hymn of praise, also.

(For the meditating yogin, Devi is the kinetic energy of the Brahman euologised as the purport (or message) of the Upaniṣads. Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda, in this beautiful concluding stanza of the "Waves of Beauty", prays to Devi, Nityā, the Eternal One, for her grace to bless his devotional hymn also.

A KUPPUSWAMI

Glossary

Listed here are words, names, marked with a superior "g" in the main text.

Abhirāmī Antādi : See under "Abhirāmībhaṭṭa".

Abhirāmībhaṭṭa: His real name was Subrahmaṇya and he was a contemporary of the Marāṭha rājā of Tañjāvūr, Śarabhoji II (1798 - 1832). He belonged to Tirukkaḍavūr, Tañjāvūr district. Subrahmaṇya came to be called Abhirāmībhaṭṭa because of his great devotion for Abhirāmī (Ambā) which finds expression in his *Abhirāmī Antādi.*

Abhiṣeka : Sprinkling; showering; bathing a deity or a guru or a respected person.

Amṛta-kalaśa: Pot containing the divine ambrosia.

Āṇḍāḷ : See under "Āzhvārs".

Appar : See under "Apparsvāmigaḷ".

Apparsvāmigaḷ : A celebrated Śaiva saint-poet of Tamiḷ Nāḍu. His hymns are included in the *Tevāram* (qv).

Aruṇagirināthar: After the Āzhvārs and Nāyanmārs his is one of the truly great names in Tamiḷ devotional poetry. He belonged to the 15th century and his hymns in praise of Kanda or Skanda (Muruga, Kumāra, Subrahmaṇya), the *Tiruppugazh* and the *Kandar Anubhūti,* are still extremely popular.

Auvvai (Auvvaiyār) : Great saint-poetess of Tamiḷ Nāḍu. Her poems combine devotion and moral instruction.

Āzhvārs : The word "Āzhvār" means "immersed in the Lord". The Āzhvārs, numbering twelve, are great Vaiṣṇava saint-poets. Their (Tamiḷ) compositions constitute the *Nālāyira-Divyaprabandham.* For the Vaiṣṇavas of the South the work is part of their sacred literature. To mention a few of the Āzhvārs : Nammāzhvār, Āṇḍāl, Kulaśekhara Āzhvār

Bhāratī: Sarasvatī. The well-known Tamiḷ poet Subrahmaṇya Bhāratī is often known simply as "Bhāratī". This great patriot—he lived between 1882 and 1921— was a worshipper of Śakti.

Bhava : Śiva; being, existence.

Bhāva : Attitude, inclination of the mind, mood, feeling; what is expressed. In poetics and dramaturgy there are two bhāvas, sthāyī and sañcārī. Sthāyī is the basic or primary sentiment or rasa explored and sañcārī is subsidiary and part of the development of the sthāyī bhāva.

Bījākṣaras : Seed letters or seed syllables used particularly in the worship of Ambā. They are believed to have great potency.

Brahmarandhra : Aperture in the crown of the head where the suṣumna nāḍi terminates.

Cakras : Wheels literally. In Kuṇḍalinī yoga cakras represent six centres (psychic planes) of the body and are regarded as lotuses or padmas. The cakras in the ascending order in the body: mūlādhāra, maṇipūra, svādhiṣṭhāna, anāhata, viśuddhi and ājña. These cakras or lotuses are the seats (respectively) of earth, water, téjas, vāyu, ākāśa and mind. Above these in the crown of the head is sahasrāra which is regarded as a lotus of one thousand petals.

Dampati : Couple, husband and wife together.

Dhyāna-śloka : A verse that enables one to meditate on a deity and visualise his or her form.

Dīkṣitar : The reference usually is to Muttusvāmī Dīkṣitar, the great Carṇātic composer.

Divyaprabandham : See under "Āzhvārs".

Durgā-Saptaśatī : Also known as the *Devī-Māhātmyam*, it is part of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*.

Gopālakṛṣṇa Bhāratī : Author of the popular Tamiḷ opera, *Nandanār Caritam*.

Guṇas : Qualities or constituents. There are three guṇas in the phenomenal world : sattva-guṇa, rajo-guṇa and tamo-guṇa (sattva, rajas, tamas). Sattva-guṇa is purity, virtue, goodness, clarity; rajo-guṇa signifies energy, passion, violence; and tamo-guna denotes darkness, inertia, sloth. The sacred texts exhort us to go beyound these three states.

Hamsa : This word is generally understood to mean a swan. But, according to some authorities, swans are not found in India. "Hamsa", anyway, is symbolic of mystical experience. A "paramahaṁsa" is believed to be a truly relalised sannyāsin.

Jñānasaṁbandhar: (Tirujñānasaṁbandhar, Saṁbandhar, Saṁbandhamūrti): One of the great figures of Tamiḷ or Southern Śaivism, he is believed to have been blessed by Ambā herself who, it is said, suckled him as a child. His compositions form part of the *Tevāram* (qv).

Japa : The meditative muttering of the names of the Lord or a mantra.

Kalpa : One-seventh of the life-span of Brahmā. (One day of Brahmā is 8,640,000,000 years. His life-span is 100 years, each year being 365 days.)

Kaṇṇappa : One of the 63 Nāyanmārs or Tamiḷ Śaiva saints. He was a hunter who dug out one of his eyes to be offered to Śiva at Kāḷahasti.

Kolam : Kolam usually means designs drawn on the floor and signify auspiciousness. The word also means beauty, costume.

Keśādi-pādānta : Portrayal of a deity from the hair on the head to the feet.

Kundumaṇi : It is a pink or red-coloured tiny seed used by goldsmiths as a weight.

Kural : One of the most widely known Tamiḷ classics, it deals with the aims of life (dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa -- *aram, porul, inbam, vīḍu*). Its author, Vallauvar or Tiruvalluvar has been assigned various dates -- 1st century B.C., 5th century A.D., and so on.

Mādhvas : Followers of Madhvācārya who belonged to the 12th-13th centuries and founded the Dvaita or dualistic school of Vedānta.

Mahāvākyas: Great dicta, formulae or pronouncements found in the Upaniṣads (like, for example, "Tat tvam asi") on which the seeker has to meditate with one-pointedness of mind.

Māṅgalya-dhāraṇa : The bride being invested with the sacred thread of auspiciousness at her marriage.

Māṅgalya-sūtra : The sacred thread of auspiciousness worn by the bride.

Manvantara : The regnal period of a Manu. One thousand Mahāyugas constitute the regnal perid of the 14 Manus put together. A mahāyuga is 4,320,000 years.

Mudras : Hand-gestures; enactment with hand-gestures.

Muttusvāmī Dīkṣitar : See under "Dīkṣitar".

Māṇikkavācakar : A highly regarded Tamiḷ Śaiva saint-poet and mystic and author of the *Tiruvācakam* and the *Tirukovaiyār* which from part of the *Tirumurai.*

Nāḍi : Nerve or blood vessel.

Naivedya : What is presented or offered to a deity.

Nāmam : When Vaiṣṇavas in the South wear the *Tirumaṇ* or sacred earth, they do so chanting the names of Viṣṇu—hence the term "nāmam". Apart from the whitish mark of the *Tirumaṇ,* the nāmam also consisists of the reddish "Śrīcūrṇam" representing Lakṣmī.

Nammāzhvār : See under "Āzhvārs".

Nāyanmārs : Nāyanār (pl. Nāyanmār) means a leader or chieftain. The Nāyanmārs are devotees of Śiva (in Tamiḷ Nāḍu) and are 63 in number, including members of all jātis.

Nirmālya : Literally the word means "without any impurity". But it also refers to the flowers or garlands used in the worship of a deity that are removed before dawn.

Niṣprapañca : This relates to the Nirguṇa Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, that is without the Māyā that is the cause of the prapañca or the contingent universe.

Nirguṇa Brahman : The Brahman that is unconditioned, without any attributes.

Pādādi-keśānta: Portrayal of a deity from the feet upward to the hair on the head.

Pāñcakṛtya-paramānanda-tāṇḍava: Through this dance Parameśvara, as Naṭarāja, performs the five functions of creation, sustenance, dissolution, veiling or tirodhāna, and anugraha.

Pativratā: A woman whose devotion to her husband is absolute. A pativratā indeed is one who has surrendered herself totally to her husband.

Pātivratya: Absolute and unquestioning devotion to the husband.

Perumāḷ : The term usually denotes Viṣṇu or any Vaiṣṇava deity. But it can also refer to any eminent personage, to one invested with greatness. Cera rulers assumed the title of Perumāḷ whether they were Vaiṣṇava or Śaiva or Jaina. Aruṇagirināthar addresses the Śaiva deity Muruga as "Perumāḷ". Sometimes Śiva himself is known as "Śiva Perumāḷ".

Periyāzhvār : Viṣṇucitta, foster-father of Āṇḍāḷ. He came to be called Periyāzhvār.

Phalaśruti : Concluding verses of a hymn which mention the rewards or "fruits" to be obtained by reciting the hymn.

Prasāda : Literally radiance or happiness. The word is usually applied to what has been offered or presented to a deity and it symbolises the grace of that deity.

Rājasik, rajo-guṇa: See under "Guṇas".

Rāmānujācārya (Rāmānuja) : Founder of the Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-dualism) school of Vedānta. He was born in Srīperumbudūr, Tamiḷ Nādu, in 1027.

Rasa : Literally "essence", "juice". In poetics or dramaturgy, mood, sentiment, flavour, the substance of aesthetic experience.

Sadāśiva Brahmendra : A great saint, yogin and mystic, he was a disciple of the 57th Śaṅkarācārya of Kāñcī (1539 - 1586). He is the author of a number of hymns and works on Advaita Vedānta.

Sādhana: Accomplishment, fulfilment; any means employed in worship and the attainment of the Supreme Being.

Sahṛdaya: Literally means one with a heart, having a heart. In poetics it means a connoisseur, one who finds delight in poetry, in dramatic enactments. It also means one who has the gift of empathising. The Mahāsvāmī himself defines sahṛdayatva as compatibility of minds.

Samādhi: The final step in yogic practice; absorption in the Infinite; state of mystical experience or enstasy; super-consciousness.

Saṁbandhamūrti, Saṁbandhar : See under "Jñānasaṁbandhar".

Sandhi : The coalescence of the final and initial letters of words; the euphonic combination of syllables.

Saṅgam : Tamiḷ academy or assembly of the learned of great antiquity, located at Madurai. There were three Saṅgams. The earliest extant Tamiḷ poetry is traced to the third Saṅgam.

Saṅgati : In music, variation of a melodic line.

Saprapañca: The term is used in relation to the Saguṇa Brahman which is associated with cosmic matters.

Śatakam : A work of 100 stanzas

Sattva, sāttvik : See under "Guṇas".

Saumāṇgalya: The state of a sumaṅgalī, state of auspiciousness. A sumaṅgalī is a woman whose husband is alive and who is possessed of all auspicious qualities.

Siddha: Accomplished adept; one who has "siddhis", superhuman faculties like "aṇima" and "mahima".

Siddhi : See under "Siddha".

Silappadikāram : One of the five great Tamiḷ poetic works, it is by the Cera prince Ilango Aḍigaḷ. It is ascribed by some historians to the 2nd century A.D. and is a Jaina classic.

Śreyas : Well-being, prosperity; well-being in the ultimate sense, that is liberation.

Subrahmaṇya Bhāratī : See under "Bhāratī".

Śukabrahman : Son of Vedavyāsa, he stands for the ultimate in brahmacarya and self-awareness.

Strīdharma : Code of conduct for women as described in the Smṛtis, Purāṇas and so on.

Sumaṅgali : See under "Saumāṅgalya".

Svadharma : "Own duty". Each varṇa, each jāti, has its own dharma, duties, to follow. The practice of svadharma itself is a means of liberation.

Tāli bhāgyam : Tamiḷ term meaning the good fortune, blessing, brought by a woman's *tali* or maṅgala-sūtra.

Tanmātras : Subtle elements.

Tāmasa, tāmasik : See under "Guṇas".

Tarpaṇa : Pleasing or satisfying; offering libations to the fathers, seers and celestials.

Tāṭaṅka : Ear-ornaments made of palm-leaf.

Tāyumānavar : The literal meaning of the word is "One who also became a Mother", that is Śiva. Tāyumānavar (1705-42) was a Tamiḷ saint-poet who attempted a synthesis between Śaiva-Siddhānta and Advaita Vedānta.

Tevāram : One of the basic scriptures of Southern or Tamil Śaivism and part of the *Tirumurai.* It includes the compositions of Tirujñānasambandhar, Sundaramūrti and Appar.

Tilaka : Ornament; a mark applied to the forehead with sandalwood paste, kuṁkuma or any unguent. The word is derived from "tila" or sesame; so the mark on the forehead is shaped like a sesame or is seasamoid. It also resembles a mini lotus petal.

Tirujñanasambandhar : See under "Jñānasaṁbandhar".

Tirukkural : See under "Kural".

Tirumantiram : See under "Tirumūlar".

Tirumūlar : A grerat Tamil siddha and mystic who must have been the forerunner of Sundaramūrti and other Śaiva saints. His *Tirumantiram* deals with authentic spiritual experience and forms part of the *Tirumurai.*

Tirumurai : It is regarded as the Veda of Tamiḷ Śaivism and comprises the *Tevāram*, the *Tiruvācakam*, the *Tirumantiram* and the *Periyapurāṇam.*

Tiruppugazh : See under " Aruṇagirināthar".

Tiruvācakam : See under "Māṇikkavācakar".

Tiruvalluvar : See under " Kural".

Upadeśa : Instruction, teaching. The word is derived from "upa + diś". The Mahāsvāmī says : "The guru does not merely ask his disciple to perform a task; he helps him by remaining by his side and directing him, indeed remaining close to his heart, and showing him the path he must follow in this life..."

Upāsaka : One engaged in worship, in a religious rite. From "upāsanā" which means "going near", "sitting by the side". An upāsaka is thus a seeker, one who seeks to go near the object of his worship.

Upāsanā : See above.

Valluvar : See under *Kural.*

Vāsanā : The word is from the root "vas" to dwell in. It means what sticks to a cloth, for instance a smell. There is thus the "smell" of earlier births adhering to the subtle body. Vāsanā is the latent memory of past experience, the impression left on the mind by past actions.

Vātsalya-bhāva : The attitude of affection, especially of parents for their children or of a deity for his/her devotees.

Vedāntadeśika : Great Vaiṣṇava ācārya, author or the *Pādukāsahasram.*

Vilāsa : The word means many things like the shyness of a woman, power or spendour of a deity, blessing.

Yantra : Diagrams representing deities used in worship. The Śrīcakra is a yantra. As the Mahāsvāmī observes it does not merely represent Ambā, it is indeed Ambā herself.

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